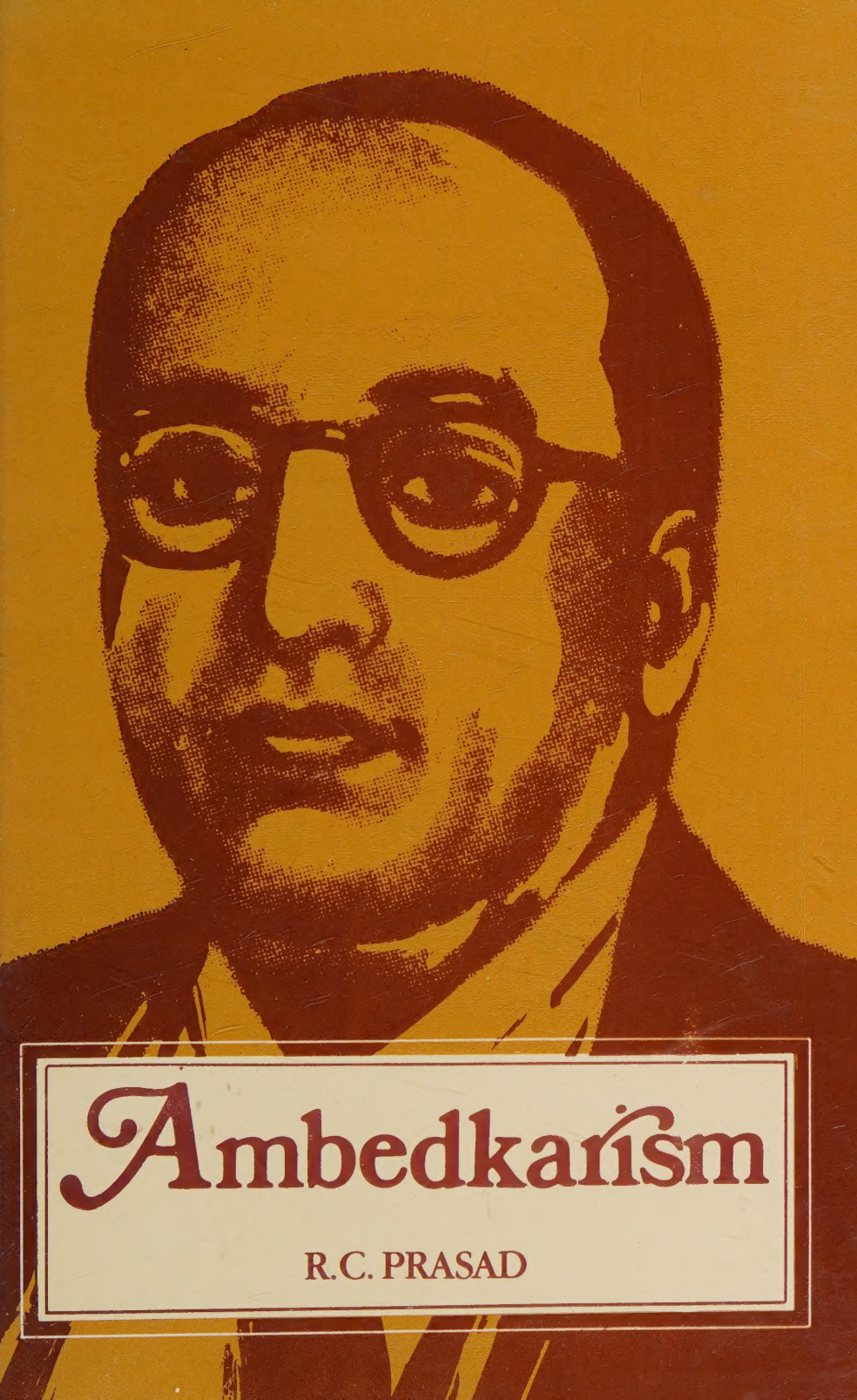

Ambedkarism

R.C. PRASAD

SHOUT
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IT

Focusing on Ambedkar's compulsion to renounce Hinduism and allow his faith to drift towards another religion, this book explores his writings and speeches in three pivotal areas: social, religious, and political. Dr. Prasad argues that it is the devastating brutalizing character of the caste system which makes for the compelling force of Ambedkar's writings and is by far the most important explanation of why *Ambedkarism* has been written. Whatever Ambedkar's manifest intention, actually it is one of the most revolutionary and ruthless critiques of casteism and phoney religiosity ever produced. What it comes to in the end is a total rejection of upper-caste social and religious hegemony, a rejection of inequality in all its forms, in its actuality as in its rationalizations; and it exposes above all the fatal effect of branding a large section of the populace untouchable. Implicit in Ambedkar's thought is another thesis altogether, that of the incompatibility of the brāhmaṇic outlook with democracy, a thesis sometimes reflecting the elemental hatred of social injustice prevailing among the Hindus.

As well as considering the main principles of Ambedkarism, the author devotes a chapter to Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak's social and moral beliefs, as reflected in his *Road to Freedom* and also studies his involvement in humanitarian work and social revolution, the relevance of his views today as a religious, social and moral reformer, and his international reputation.

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AMBEDKARISM

However strong and however filthy be the abuses which the Congress Press chooses to shower on me I must do my duty. I am no worshipper of idols. I believe in breaking them. I insist that if I hate Mr. Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah—I dislike them, I do not hate them—it is because I love India more. That is the true faitha of a nationalist. I have hopes that my countrymen, will some day learn that the country is greater than the men, that the worship of Mr. Gandhi or Mr. Jinnah and service to India are two very different things and may even be contradictory to each other.

B.R. AMBEDKAR

AMBEDKARISM

R. C. Prasad

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To

SHRI K.R. NARAYANAN

VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

in all esteem and
admiration

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Foreword

This book, a pellucid adumberation of Ambedkarism and a selection of Ambedkar's views on various matters, especially on Hinduism, reveals the author as an exceptionally able literary analyst. He is among the first to lay bare the most outstanding features of the socio-political movement called Ambedkarism and the anti-brahmanic bias or impulsion informing Ambedkar's account of Hinduism, i.e., of the social and religious ethos implicit in the Hindu śāstras of which *Manusmṛti* is an indispensable, integral part.

There can be no doubt any longer that Babasaheb was the messiah of the dalits and almost alone in his day in questioning the propriety of Mahatma Gandhi's refusal to annihilate the Varṇa-system. More than a few political leaders of stature have been taken aback by Ambedkar's attitude to the Mahatma and to brāhmaṇism. Still, Ambedkarism ignores them all. However, there are certain revelations in the published volumes of Babasaheb's *Writings and Speeches* that are of immense social and historical importance. I am referring, especially, to the story of Shivaji and to the riddles of Hinduism. The reverberations of these writings and speeches in the social and political awakening of the down-trodden struggling for their rights and job reservations are apparent though the opposition to them still persists.

Then there is the tantalizing question of my being an Ambedkarian that has surfaced in the fifth chapter of this book. It is to Dr. Prasad's credit that he treats this question from all possible angles with candour, tact, and good judgment. Account must also be taken of his distinction between Bapu's social ethos and my action sociology. Dr. Prasad quotes extensively from my book *Road to Freedom* and is inclined to see in my beliefs and actions a paradox and an ambiguity—my love of the Hindu saṁskāras and my commitment to the cause of scavengers' freedom. All I can say is that at this early date it has not been impossible for me

to reconcile my love of the śāstras with my commitment to social reform. On the whole Dr. Prasad has given us a fairly plausible account of Ambedkarism, to which very little can be added unless further documentation becomes available. As it is, Ambedkarism is a 'manifesto', but it is not without inwardness in its analysis of ideas.

The publication of such books on Ambedkar (*A Preface to Ambedkarism* is forthcoming) is a credit to the publishers; and it may be hoped that it will be of some benefit to evaluation of this radical writer, which, as the recently published critical books make clear, does not seem to know what Babasaheb was about. The literary title of this book, like Marxism, romanticism, imagism, etc., indicates even better than its contents that Babasaheb was the initiator of a new movement and that what is called 'the Ambedkar problem' is easily resolved if this redicalism of the man is borne in mind, for the radicals do raise problems and are misunderstood by their contemporaries and status quoists.

BINDESHWAR PATHAK

Preface

It is my purpose in this book to try to set forth certain tendencies in Bhimrao Ambedkar's writings and to show their socio-political significance. To persons already familiar with Ambedkar's writings, my explanations and comments will seem rudimentary; but I believe that every student of contemporary social history of India must be reminded again and again why Ambedkar discarded his ancestral religion and reacted against it, giving rise to a socio-political movement called Ambedkarism. One who struggles to establish an egalitarian social structure, as Ambedkar did by establishing the 'Council for the Welfare of the Outcasts', is an Ambedkarian. Such actions arising from certain humanitarian ideals which call for tireless militancy, if necessary, constitute Ambedkarism. The term *Ambedkarism* has also been used to describe the militant's technique of waging his struggle for the uplift of the untouchable dalits of society. An ideal Ambedkarian is one who possesses, like Ambedkar, 'the one non-negotiable quality' of matchless courage and prodigious intellectual energy supportive of his value system. He is no hero-worshipper. Nor is he a naive aggressive opponent of casteism sunken in solitary brooding; given a chance, he must also be willing to be a constructive realist. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, an Ambedkarian, reminds us that though Ambedkar was aggressively hostile to casteist Hinduism, he was nonetheless a constructive politician even to the point of becoming a Minister in the Nehru Cabinet and a compromising meliorist. He who upholds Ambedkarism must however engage himself in serving the cause of social justice and try to model himself on 'the Mahar Manu', one of the most independent men of political action with a rebellious vision. Ambedkarians are all out to demolish what Justice Iyer calls the *status quo ante* which denied the basics of human rights. A model of Ambedkarism is a swordsman of social justice and a belittler of oppressive inequa-

lity. He is a neo-Buddhist. Abundant examples of Ambedkarism are to be found in the political activities of those who are fighting for group weightage and group justice, for, that is, 'opportunities of escalation'.

Ambedkarism is an unambivalent upholder of the reservation 'therapy'. An Ambedkarian, like Justice Iyer and other key Harijan/Girijan writers and leaders, is tireless in affirming that

> The sooner we increase the annual intake of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe the quicker the measure of group justice. And by hastening massive influx we may hasten earlier the closure of reservation. Overall presence of Scheduled Caste/ Scheduled Tribe hands broadly established once, the inequality cry can be silenced. This strategy of group justice must apply not only to sweepers and scavengers but to secretaries and judges and for promotion positions. Individual injustice is inevitable when any measure of group justice is implemented. Is there any cause without martyrs?[1]

Ambedkarism appears for the first time in such expressions as Iyer's "Ambedkarism sprang to life", but it would be reasonable to suppose that its lineage is traceable to Ambedkar's own writings on Buddhism. The elements constituting Ambedkarism appear with an unambiguous force where Ambedkar deals with the philosophy of Hinduism and where he compares Marxism with Buddhism. It is from these prolix essays that all the constituent elements of Ambedkarism are fully gleaned.

I am not alluding to the mere fact that Ambedkarism is nothing more than a collection of these doctrines and principles. The important point is the way in which these principles are held and applied to judge Hinduism or to contemporary political leaders and their ideologies. Ambedkar does not appear to have changed his opinions. He not only published for all ages what he felt about casteism and casteist religion and politics, but also he devoted himself to the eradication of the devilish system which had marginalized a large chunk of Hindu population. He was searching for a system that could replace the effete and oppressive Hindu system of caste and inequality. The quest had led to Buddhism which, too, had rejected Hinduism and its caste-ridden,

1. I.D.F., p. 108.

brahmanic hegemony. Ambedkar remained a Buddhist ever since he read the life of the Buddha, and his interest in the doctrine of worth as opposed to that of birth to measure a person was a Buddhist interest. He performed an immense service both to the unprivileged classes and to the upper, elitist sectors by reminding them of it, particularly to the caste Hindus who were exhorted to think of the evil casteism and blind dependence on the *śāstras* has led to. He was of the view that any system, religious or political, which was devoid of spiritual values would cease to have a civilizing influence on mankind and would degenerate into hereditary superstition of the brāhmaṇic type. But his attitude to attachment and forgiveness was very different from that of the Buddha. Consider some of his phrases about the Vedas, Manu, and Gandhi. Ambedkarism indicts them all. One of the most important reasons why he does not forgive them is that they had oppressed the untouchables not for a decade or two but for centuries. One must not be surprised if his tone often becomes bitter when talking or writing about them. Passages can be quoted *ad infinitum* from Ambedkar, more particularly from the third volume of his published *Writings and Speeches*, which would justify all the charges levelled against the Hindus and their śāstras. Ambedkar dissected Hinduism and brāhmaṇism with Buddhist thoughts in his head. He systematized the welter of anti-Hindu charges also in the fourth, fifth and eighth volumes of his published work, and in the course of his writings he reiterated, repeated, stressed, but he did not give up his Buddhist stance, his faith in one man, one value and in the untransferability of merit or otherwise from one generation to another—from father to son. For a casteist Hindu this was a much-needed reminder.

Thus, in point of fact Ambedkarism derives directly from an anti-Hindu, pro-Buddhist ideology. Its thought is through and through Buddhist both in socio-political and in theological spheres. Ambedkar's life-long experiences of humiliation and segregation on account of his dalit origin contributed to the formation of his philosophy and to his conversion.

I am indebted to Mr. Digvijay Narayan Singh who has not only been an efficient amanuensis but also a generator of many ideas fundamental to the discussion contained in the book; thanks are also due to him for the great labour of revision of the

successive drafts of the various chapters. Of many others who helped me complete this volume, Rohit Ranjan of St. Michael's has played the most crucial role and has checked the quotations. I am also indebted to Messers Motilal Banarsidass, Indological Publishers of Delhi, for books and information.

R.C. Prasad

Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in the footnotes are W.S. and I.D.F. which stand for Ambedkar's *Writings and Speeches* and V.R. Krishna Iyer's *The Dalit Future*.

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1

Introduction

On whatever Ambedkar wrote there is distinctively a stamp, overt or hidden, of his personal experiences, principally those of humiliation and oppression due to his menial background. His veering away from Hinduism, his ancestral religion, and coming under the spell of Buddhism are two of the greatest events in his life, events that not only shaped his thought but also influenced the course of social history in India. His reaction to Hinduism and its caste-ridden, discriminative, demoralizing, hierarchical *varṇa*-based institutions is not dissimilar to Gautama Buddha's. Both quite disdained the śāstras and believed like the Ch'an masters that "The Scriptures are just words—mere ink and paper —and everything of that sort is just an empty device. All those words and phrases are based on something people once heard—they are naught but emptiness."[1] It is certain that Ambedkar's familiarity and consanguinity of temperament with Buddhism, which views Hinduism as a system and network of rituals, delusions and idols, may have helped him to formulate his religious philosophy. And this brings us to the whole moot matter of Ambedkar's attitude to the Congress and Gandhi who had done little or nothing to eradicate the practice common in casteist social systems of insulating and ostracizing large sections of the country's population.

That Ambedkar was thoroughly grounded in the religious literature of the Hindus no student who has tried to follow up his references in 'Annihilation of Caste', 'Philosophy of Hinduism', 'The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles', 'Symbols of Hinduism', 'Reformers and Their Fate', 'The Decline and Fall of Buddhism', 'The Triumph of Brahmanism', 'Krishna and

His Gita', etc. has ever doubted. Nor has he questioned his familiarity with the current events of his age or with the activities of the Congress. Ambedkar himself avows from time to time his familiarity with the sources of Hindu thought, thus implying that his arguments are based not on any hearsay; they owe their forcefulness and tenability chiefly to steady intimacy with the Hindu scriptures from his youth upwards. And, as his biographers have shown, he was not limited to this area; instead his mind roved over the whole field of theology, philosophy, economics, law, literature, etc. The reader will at once discover that from the day he read the life of Gautama Buddha, he became a neo-Buddhist, for Buddhism as he understood it measured up to his general beliefs. With his depth and variety of learning, he could understand Buddhist philosophy better than an ordinary upholder of the Buddhist faith. He was particularly attracted towards its advocacy of a classless society and democratic institutions. Hinduism, he noticed, harmonized with the feudalistic trend of the middle ages in advocating a social hierarchy.[2] It was this social hierarchy that was repellent to Ambedkar. If he was drawn towards Buddhism it was also because non-violence was one of its central tenets. Non-violence alone can lead to peace and peace is unavoidable for freedom. "The study of the problem of freedom", A.K. Warder observes in his conclusion to *Indian Buddhism*, "naturally depends on human societies enjoying peace and security . . . instead of being swept along in the pell-mell of militarism and false propaganda. In societies dominated by violence and militarism words like 'freedom', which most people find attractive, are debased to mean their exact opposite and used to rally people to the cause of violence. . . . Truth, non-violence, freedom, toleration and other principles are inseparable. If we lose one, we lose all."[3]

Then there were economic considerations as well. Ambedkar saw that Buddhism attached utmost importance to economic freedom and when making economic recommendations it clearly said that the well-being of society depends on a sound economic basis. Economic prosperity, according to the Buddhist system, is the only effective means of ending the revolt of the subjects of Great Realm, and at the same time enriches the king himself, 'since his investment in his country brings a return (through taxation) and his wealth in fact accumulates'. The śūdras and the panchamas

had suffered privation and starvation on account of their grinding poverty. Ambedkar himself had tasted its acrid bitterness, its pungency. He felt gratified to find that the Buddhist system regarded the pacification and economic well-being of society essential for its own success, for its communities and their 'best life' to flourish and spread, for its doctrines to be studied. "It is self-evident that if the Buddhist communities depend primarily on alms given by laymen and village-and-town dwellers at large, the monks going round every morning with their bowls to collect food, the society must be fairly prosperous to support them."[4]

A brief, lucid summary of the Buddhist economic policy as made by Warder is as follows:

> It is the duty of a king, then, to prevent poverty—the root of so many evils, as we have been shown—by grants to the poor. This principle of the ancient emperors, which maintained both prosperity and morality until one of them failed to continue it, is elucidated by the advice to Great Realm. Three productive (economically) classes of society are envisaged. The peasantry or farmers are to be supplied with seed to expand their agriculture and with fodder if they take up cattle breeding. Traders are to be supplied with capital to undertake their operations. The third class probably (to judge from Indian society as described in the *Tripiṭaka*) included a great variety of wage earners working in the royal service, not merely officials, soldiers and the like. It was usual in that period for various industries, such as mining, the metal industries and the textile industry, to be organised directly by the government (the *Arthaśāstra*, *c.* 300 B.C., recommends a state monopoly in several industries, especially mining). Some industries were carried on by merchants, more by guilds of craftsmen, but the Buddha's advice to kings to dispense wages and food to those in the royal service certainly means that the basic industries of the country are to be expanded by the ruler increasing his labour force. Other industries would be expanded by part of the capital grants to merchants, as well as indirectly encouraged by successful trade.[5]

Very many more such paragraphs can be added to show the im-

portance the Buddha attached to economic prosperity. With Ambedkar's own writing on the subject before us, we can appreciate why Ambedkarism favours the same economic ideal. In his essay on 'Buddha or Karl Marx' Ambedkar approves of the Buddhist style of acquiring wealth and says: "Thus to acquire wealth legitimately and justly, earned by great industry, amassed by strength of the arm and gained by sweat of the brow, is a great blessing. The householder makes himself happy and cheerful and preserves himself full of happiness; also makes his parents, wife, and children, servants, and labourers, friends and companions happy and cheerful, and preserves them full of happiness."[6] Only the wealthy must not give way to greed, avarice, ill-will, etc. Even a worldly householder who gets rid of such stains of the mind acquires great wisdom, abundant wisdom, and clear vision. To the Ambedkarians the wonder of all wonders is that the Buddha established communism without dictatorship and that he approved of acquiring wealth lawfully. What they also appreciate is the Buddha's clear injunction that he who is well-to-do must see to it that his relations also get their wealth lawfully.

The extraordinary subtlety, accuracy, intelligence, and sensitivity of Ambedkar's mind are reflected in the meaningful, and therefore selective, ordering of the facts in this essay. His assembling of facts from Buddhist antiquity adds up to, briefly, the following picture. The only thing which could sustain a state after force is withdrawn is religion. Humanity does not only want economic values; it has always retained spiritual values for its survival. From wealth not being bestowed on the destitute poverty, stealing, violence, murder, lying, immorality, etc. grow rife. When these evils grow common, the descendants of the humans have a life-span of ten years. It is the caste system that has produced all these evils and bred inequality and encouraged oppression. The blessing of virtuous conduct consists in abstaining from violence, taking life, thieving, unchastity, lying and partaking of fermented liquor. "The blessing of liberality consists in the householder living with mind freed from the taint of avarice, generous, open-handed, delightening (sic) in gifts, a good one to be asked and devoted to the distribution of gifts. . . ."[7]

The movement called Ambedkarism represents, as this discussion makes clear, the culmination of the anti-brāhmaṇic move-

ment pioneered by the Buddha in antiquity. In order to have a pretty clear idea of the issues which have been raised by Ambedkar, it must be borne in mind that though Ambedkarism is derived from the teachings of the Buddha, we have today an entirely distinct movement which is more socio-political than spiritual. While being a reaction against Hinduism or brāhmaṇism, it has a positive aspect as well: to upgrade the untouchable and to do away with untouchability. The brāhmaṇism against which it is a reaction meant, in the domain of politics and morals, a rigorous feudal order, caste-based and exploitative, its central tenet being belief in the superiority of the caste Hindus and the inferiority of the downgraded harijans and untouchables. Ambedkarism is thus a reaction against the Establishment, or rather against brāhmaṇism and plutocracy with a view ultimately to annihilating the barbaric, primitive system of caste and doing away with all social inequalities; its ultimate goal is to establish social justice and democracy based on the principle of one man, one value. Ambedkarism is opposed to (i) endogamy, (ii) the Hindu caste system, (iii) the śāstras including the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, and (iv) Mahatma Gandhi's vindication of *varṇa*. The adherents of Ambedkarism are no worshippers of idols; they believe in breaking them, and insist that they are no hero-worshippers. If they indict or impeach a person it is because they love India more. That is the true faith of an Ambedkarist who is imbued with the hope that his countrymen will some day learn that the country is greater than any of its men and that the worship of any individual—a Gandhi or a Nehru—and service to India are two very different things and may even be mutually contradictory.

Ambedkarism has its roots in the conviction that whatever hinders the eradication of caste system or consolidates the foundations of marginalization is a perpetrator of caste iniquities. Ambedkarism is therefore committed to the annihilation of *jāti* system and does not tire of pouring scorn upon it.

It regards the age of Gandhi as the dark age of India. Those inspired by Ambedkarism believe that in this Gandhi age people, instead of looking for their ideals in the future, returned to antiquity. The age of Gandhi, asserts Ambedkarism, is essentially and incontrovertibly an age in which people had ceased to think

for themselves and as they had ceased to think they had ceased to read and examine the facts of their lives. In this connection it refers to Ambedkar's declaration: "The fate of an ignorant democracy which refuses to follow the way shown by learning and experience and chooses to grope in the dark paths of the mystics and the megalomaniacs is a sad thing to contemplate."

Ambedkarism must deal a blow to all caste-ridden persons, however great or mighty, and to all systems, however sanctified by tradition and scripture, so that no varṇa-enchantment remains undissolved.[8]

It is non-sectarian but not irreligious or areligious.

It is profoundly patriotic with two more slogans added to those of equality, liberty and fraternity: Down with brahmanism! Down with socio-cultural disparities!

It condemns all uppish, elitist approach to the question of reservation.

It insists that every Indian, including every untouchable and unapproachable, shall be equal.

In Ambedkar's view human rights must be guaranteed if the dalit sector has to have a fair deal.

Its ultimate goal is 'positive abolition of a die-hard backwardness which stultifies the reality—not the formality—of equal opportunity'. To the upholders of Ambedkarism, "The caste system, with its fourfold divisions, has suppressed and strangled human numbers based on their birth and alienated them from the title to equality in the quality of life and the right to rise to excellence on fair terms of competition. Barbarized beneath even the Shudra caste and other vocational reproachability, have been the *panchama* proletariat reduced (sic) serfdom and bonded labour as the eternal tenants of an exploitative system, and struggling at the bottom of the feudal pyramid structured in rigid decks of graded inferiority. This homo hierarchicus syndrome deprived those born into the humbler castes and the *panchama* fold equality before God and Man and banished them from the banquet of civilization. If democracy means equal social status and equal cultural and economic potential, our caste-ridden, communally divided Bharat, with its freezing feudal gradations, medieval occupational proscriptions and manifold other temporal spiritual proscriptions has sterilized all but the upper classes of

the legitimate share in the national power processes, material resources and many-sided advances."[9]

Ambedkar, who has handed down these doctrines, says over and over that, when equality goes out of a country or nation, all prosperity goes, and when prosperity goes, slavery steps in, and when slavery steps in, all the deadly iniquities step in.

Believing in the essential equality of all men, Ambedkar refused to prostrate himself before the Mahatma and before the Government. Despite the fact that he was often gruffly loud-mouthed in his criticism of some of his contemporaries and their ideas, there was something inspiring and magnetic about his personality that captured the imagination of his listeners. He was a striking figure, bold and forthright in his speech, with the manner of a wrathful prophet at times. Every important work he wrote is replete with scholarly allusions, but its fervent message stands out clearly and intelligibly. Perhaps one reason for Ambedkar's appeal was his untiring militancy and that many of his oppressed underprivileged contemporaries noticed in him an irrepressible fighter for their cause. Ambedkar's message of one man, one value, equality and a casteless society, though still an ideal to be realized, seemed a breath of hope in what was to the insulated classes a hostile, barren environment.

In the ebb and flow of the political upheavals of his times, Ambedkar found himself in a camp opposed to the Congress and its leaders, was severely criticized for his views on minority representation in the legislatures, but he continued his peripatetic struggle in Maharashtra and in other parts of India. Most of his life after April 1923 was spent in India battling with forces hostile to his egalitarian ideas. The suttas listed in Appendix I contain some of his beliefs, ideals, and precepts.* It would perhaps be more precise to say that these beliefs, ideals, and precepts constitute a new Dhammapada—new because of their new content and language. Like the author of the original Dhammapada, the writer of these suttas will be found to have been an acute critic of brāhmaṇic śāstras, a critic endowed with a magnanimous imagination that was busily engaged during his active years in fighting for the rights of the depressed segment of the Indian society. His own experiences as a Mahar dalit had

*See Appendix I.

taught him that Manu was the real villain of the piece and that his laws were a collection of fallacies, confusions, and devices to inflate the pride of brāhmaṇs and exploit the ostracized sections of the people. The brāhmaṇs had continued to thrive at the expense of those who submitted to their śāstras. Ambedkar set out to right these wrongs with his mind and his pen.

A barrister by profession, he was unique as a radical patriot. He rejected most of the currently progressive ideas, such as the belief that religion is the opium of the people. In place of the vague generalizations and pious platitudes that satisfied his contemporaries, Congressmen and members of the Hindu Mahasabha alike, Ambedkar honoured one principle which is the central principle of Buddhism, the principle of equality. The Buddha, he says, was a thorough equalitarian. This equalitarian doctrine thus antedated Ambedkar; however, he made it the focal point of his entire thinking, elaborated it in speech after speech, and through his writings and followers influenced the course of Indian history with it.

His approach was simple. In judging any ideology, practice or institution, he would inquire about how it helped raise the capabilities and status of the disadvantaged categories and what its actual effects were. Did the particular person he was judging try to tear down caste barriers or did he do the reverse? If the former, could he be made to fight for the equality of all mankind? If his religion forbade him to do so, could such a religion be eliminated?

Ambedkar, no less than Gandhi, was concerned with inculcating the value of non-violence and truth in general, but it is Ambedkar who accepted the essential teachings of the Buddha as a priceless legacy on both religious and political grounds. Gandhi was drawn to so many faiths and was more of an eclectic than an orthodox believer wedded to any fixed set of beliefs. His non-violence owes much to Christianity, to Tolstoy and to many other thinkers; Ambedkar drew upon, and was indebted to, Buddhism with which his beliefs had a marked spiritual affinity. His conception of religion and morality was precisely Gautama Buddha's and is notable as evidence showing the relevance of the Buddha's teachings to our own times. It is in this context that he declared: "The Buddha is generally asso-

ciated with the doctrine of Ahimsa. That is taken to be the be-all and end-all of his teachings. Hardly anyone knows that what the Buddha taught is something very vast; far beyond Ahimsa. It is therefore necessary to set out in detail his tenets."[10]

To Ambedkar religion becomes a cruel superstition when man and morality cease to be the centre of religion. Since there is no God morality must become the law of life and cease to be a mere ideal. As regards the function of religion, Ambedkar, voicing the doctrine of the Buddha, says that it is to reconstruct the world and to make it happy, not to explain its origin or its end. Ambedkar had seen and experienced much unhappiness in the world around him like Gautama, suffering due mainly to conflicts of interest, to his low birth and to the social stigmas attached to his class of people. He is therefore convinced that the only way to solve it is to follow the aṣṭāṅga mārga. Central to this thought is also the doctrine that private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another. It is in this belief that Ambedkar's rejection of elitism is rooted. It also provides the reason why he battled for social levelling-up and spoke against the detractors of a society built upon the ideals of equality and liberty. Of outstanding importance, however, is Ambedkar's assertion, also derived from Buddhism, that all human beings are equal. Such a pronouncement must be clearly understood, for it is from this that most of his doctrines and treatises flow and derive their unity and interest. Another doctrine to which considerable significance is attached is also derived from Buddhism: it is that worth and not birth is the measure of man. Led by these noble teachings, Ambedkar fought on stubbornly to smash all casteist ideologies and their champions to smithereens and played the vanguard role in the movement for the liberation of the untouchables. He was shocked indeed to notice even some frontrankers and organizers leading various sectors of the popular masses doing little for eradicating the caste system.

The Buddhist belief that what is important is not noble birth but a high degree of morality based on high ideals is of prime importance to Ambedkar. He applies this doctrine in all his disquisitions on caste and on untouchability. The advocates of orthodox concepts, especially those sanctified by the śāstras or

embedded in the Vedas and the Purāṇas had little faith in such a noble doctrine. To them if there was any measure of the greatness of man, it was his birth. They had in fostering such a belief cultivated inequality and in abandoning fellowship towards all given ample proof of their narrowness and ignorance. Some of Ambedkar's writings are forceful pleas for universal education from which neither women nor the base-born should be debarred. One of the Buddhist canons declares that everyone has a right to learn, for learning is as necessary for man to live as food is. For the Buddhist learning without character is dangerous. And for him nothing is infallible; nothing is binding forever. The reason given by the Buddhist for this is that everything is subject to inquiry and examination and that nothing is final or beyond the operation of the law of causation. Ambedkar, finding in such doctrines the reason why the Hindu claim that the Vedas are *sanātan* must be rejected, has little hesitation in accepting them. Emboldened by the Buddhist faith in the impermanence of things, he also asserts that nothing is infallible, permanent and *sanātan*. For him, as for the Buddhist, being is always becoming.

From the socio-revolutionary doctrines of Buddhism, which are like logical premises, Ambedkar drew his reasons for rejecting Hinduism which was for him synonymous with brahmanism. He had read a lot about it and had seen it in practice: brāhmaṇic ignorance, the brāhmaṇs' occupation with themselves, their pursuit of every bauble in the hope that it would satisfy the cravings of their hearts, etc. He applies what was a memorable Buddhist norm and finds the brāhmaṇs culpable. Inextricably engrossed in worldly pursuits, they had shut their eyes to the fact that everyone of us is but a tiny part of a measureless whole and that only when one begins to realize how impermanent a thing is one's temporary individuality, can one even enter upon this narrow path. They were dependent on the efficacy of rites and ceremonies. Buddhism had taught Ambedkar to abandon all ritualism and to reject the belief that any outward acts, any priestly powers and holy ceremonies can afford a person any assistance of any kind. No good resolutions, however firm, he was told, will lead to anything unless a man gets rid of ritualistic formalities.

Some of Ambedkar's readers are baffled to notice the vehem-

ence with which he rejects Marxism, whose progressive doctrines should have drawn him to Marxian socialism, but instead of commending the Marxist brand of socialism, its stress on castelessness and its rejection of inequality, he does not approve of any system based on a hatred of religion. "To the Communists", he observes, "religion is anathema. Their hatred of religion is so deep-seated that they will not even discriminate between religions which are helpful to Communism and religions which are not. The Communists have carried their hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between the two."[11] He goes on to show that if the Russians are proud of their Communism, it is because they forget that more than half a century before Christ the Buddha had established Communism unbacked by dictatorship. His method, Ambedkar maintains, was different. It was "to change the mind of man: to alter his disposition: so that whatever man does, he does it voluntarily without the use of force or compulsion .... The Buddha's way was not to force people to do what they did not like to do ..."

Ambedkar does not deny that the communist dictatorship in Russia has wonderful achievements to its credit. Such a dictatorship, in his opinion, would be good for all backward countries. But he also reminds us that this is no argument at all for permanent dictatorship. His guiding principle has been that humanity wants more than economic values; it also wants spiritual values to be retained. Reminding us of Carlyle's description of political economy as a pig philosophy, he first rejects this assertion on the ground that man does need material comforts and then rejects the Communist cult because the aim of the latter seems to be 'fatten pigs as though men are no better than pigs'. Ambedkar ends his view of Communism by stating that man, being what he is, "must grow materially as well as spiritually. Society has been aiming to lay a new foundation was (sic) summarised by the French Revolution in three words, Fraternity, Liberty and Equality. The French Revolution was welcomed because of this slogan. It failed to produce equality. We welcome the Russian Revolution because it aims to produce equality. But it cannot be too much emphasized that in producing equality society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality

will be of no value without fraternity and liberty. It seems that the three can co-exist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all."[12]

Armed with faith in the efficacy and propriety of these doctrines squaring with his own cherished values, Ambedkar continued his fight staunchly and unwaveringly to abolish the caste system and other inequalities, to ensure equality based on humanity irrespective of sex, *varṇa* or *jāti*, to improve the social position of the depressed classes, the achuts and women, and to respect their personalities.

Class and caste systems, more than anything, strike at the very root of Buddhism and of Ambedkar's avowed aims and ideals. He had from the beginning realized that there is no nobler truth than the gospel of universal salvation taught by Buddhism. This central idea of Buddhist teaching rested on the belief in the fundamental oneness of all things. There are in the world, according to Buddhism, manifold existences and countless beings, and each of these individuals deems himself a separate being, unrelated to the rest. Ambedkar and his followers reject such a concept. They reject it because such a notion harmonizes with the brāhmaṇic ideology which *in practice* repudiates the idea of the fundamental oneness of all beings. Had the brāhmaṇs accepted the idea of this essential oneness of the manifold existences, they would have annihilated their *varṇa* system and refused to brand a section of people untouchable. Ambedkarism, following Buddhism, teaches that in reality the manifold existences we see around us make up one family, there is one continuity throughout, and this oneness is to be realized in the establishment of a society based on social justice and equality—in the attainment of Buddhahood on the part of each and all. Brāhmaṇism cared not an atom for the salvation of all as it did for the brāhmaṇs themselves and for their clients. Ambedkar and his disciples noticed to their exceeding satisfaction that according to Buddhism individuals may purify themselves and thereby escape the miseries of sinful existence, yet the salvation of anyone is imperfect so long as and so far as there remain any who have not realized the universal spiritual communion, i.e. who are not saved. Brahmanism does not believe in saving oneself by saving others. Ambedkarism

whole-heartedly subscribes to the gospel of universal salvation taught by Buddhism.

Can a caste-ridden religion uphold and propagate such a noble teaching and show such a way to universal salvation? The egocentric caste Hindus led by their brāhmaṇ priests have nothing to do with saving themselves by saving others despite their sublime śāstric creed that the world of separate beings is essentially one family. Ambedkar had no doubt at all that if there were no Hindus there would have been no śūdras or that if there were only Buddhists, there would have been no caste system at all. The extraordinary compassion of the Buddha embraces all mankind, while brāhmaṇism leaves out the śūdras. Pity and compassion in Buddhism are co-extensive with all creation, depriving nothing of the Buddha's grace. The particular doctrine which left an ineffaceable mark on Ambedkar is probably the following:

> A Bodhisattva is one who, having attained the goal of purification and emancipation, refuses to enter Nirvana, out of devoted love for those who still remain behind and a consuming zeal to help them. He postpones his own entrance into perfect bliss because his sense of spiritual oneness with others leads him to prefer to wait with them and lovingly serve them until all are ready to enter together. In Anesaki's words, he feels that his own salvation would be imperfect, and even impossible, as long as any living beings remain unsaved.[13]

Here was a chance even for the untouchables to enter Nirvana. The door to salvation was open to all. Ambedkar was fully conversant with the history of Buddhism and knew that the Buddha confronted more or less the same features of the broader human situation as he himself did. In general, Gautama was aware that the situation demanded radical social readjustment and deepening religious faith. Wars were frequent between one petty prince and another and between rival clans. The organization of society was moving more and more in the direction of a rigid caste system. Hinduism had obviously degenerated, so much so that

> The struggle to rise above one's present social status and win a larger sphere of opportunity in life was becoming increa-

> singly difficult. Religious insight was being obstructed by the dead hand of the past; the Vedas were frequently taught as a collection of authoritative texts rather than as living truths to be tested and reinterpreted (if need be) in the present. Heavy and probably increasing emphasis was placed on the correct performance of rite and ceremony. Religious thinkers, in the attempt to satisfy their metaphysical curiosity, were championing varied cosmological systems, each visionary claiming truth for his pet theory and heaping argumentative scorn on the theories of his opponents. Worst of all, perhaps, from Buddha's standpoint, religion was straying through these and other vices away from the insistent, poignant, practical needs of men and women. It was not leading them toward true fulfillment and more dependable happiness; it was becoming mired in obstructive tradition, repetitious rite, and dead or cantankerous dogma.[14]

Ambedkar systematically arraigns Hinduism on the same ground, for the same reasons, and rejects it on account of the same socio-religious evils. What Gautama saw all around him, Ambedkar, too, saw—history repeating itself. Just as Gautama repudiated the caste-ridden religion of the brāhmaṇs, so does Ambedkar jettison the śāstric tenets and worn-out creeds. When brāhmaṇism was fouled with hypocrisies and cluttered with a formalism that obscured the underlying spiritual truths, the Buddha was born; when the same conditions reappeared and brāhmaṇism allowed itself to degenerate into obscure formalisms and empty dogmas, Ambedkar, making his providential advent, was forced to turn away from it and take shelter in Buddhism. Here was a religion that, instead of loathing the achuts, welcomed them and, disregarding their so-called humble origin, gave them due respect.

Ambedkar, whose avidity for book-learning is well-known and who is said to have run, by the time he was less than fortyfour, through the whole repertoire of Buddhist ideas, must have read the stories illustrative of the Buddha's rejection of caste. "A man does not become a brāhmaṇ by his family or by birth", the Buddha had said. "In whom there is truth and righteousness he is blessed, he is a brāhmaṇ." Nor were the blessings of salvation denied to any person, regardless of his station or caste. The

Buddha had made it clear that his doctrine made no distinction between high and low, rich and poor; it was like the sky, he said; it had room for all, like water it washed all alike.

Ambedkar's search for the essential teachings of the compassionate Buddha must have led him to the beautiful Buddhist story of Ananda coming to a well and asking a girl of low and despised caste for a drink of water. But the girl, fearing a gift from her hands would make him unclean, declined, telling him her caste. Ananda, says the story, replied: "My sister, I did not ask thee concerning thy caste or thy family. I beg water of thee, if thou canst give it me. To him in whom love dwells, the whole world is but one family."

To what else could Ambedkar turn if not to the Master who taught Ananda to be so magnanimous, so above all castes and creeds?

To sum up, Ambedkarism is an antidote to all casteist creeds, especially to brāhmaṇism, as Buddhism had been an antidote to Hinduism; it corresponds to Buddhism, and is in fact an outgrowth of it. But whereas it was characteristic of the Buddhists to spiritualize their faith, the Ambedkarians are concerned with socio-political issues. Like the earlier revolt against brāhmaṇism, Ambedkarism also hates formulas and discards conventions; both believe in defying the society with which their followers feel themselves at odds. The Ambedkarian has detached himself from society and schools which propagate casteism and insulate the depressed classes from reaping the fruit of social justice and democracy. The heroes of the Ambedkarians would rather drop out of Hinduism and discard their faith than have to accept an oppressive cult.

The Ambedkarian is a crusader, a rebel and a true Stealer of Fire. Relieved of the necessity to provide the ornaments of style and verbal links which other forms of exposition require, he is able to achieve a forceful terseness which is very much to the point from beginning to end—a style which brings us closer to Ambedkar, because he seems to be addressing us straight from his heart as though we were actually face to face with him.

Notes

1. John Blofeld (tr.), *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai* (New York, 1972), p. 92.
2. *Vide* A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 1980) pp. 513 ff.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 520.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.
6. *W. S.*, Vol. 3, p. 461.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 461.
8. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is to the Ambedkarians no less than an Arhat-Buddha like Ananda. This belief rests on some memorable sutras in the fifth chapter of *Maha-parinibbana-Sutta* (37-38) which apply to Ambedkar with equal pertinency:

'He is a wise man, brethren,—is Ananda. He knows when it is the right time for him to come and visit the Tathagata, and when it is the right time for the brethren and sisters of the order, for devout men and devout women, for a king, or for a king's ministers, for other teachers or their disciples, to come and visit the Tathagata.

'Brethren, there are these four wonderful and marvellous qualities in Ananda. Which are the four?

'If, brethren, a number of the brethren of order should come to visit Ananda, they are filled with joy on beholding him; and if Ananda should then preach the truth to them, they are filled with joy at the discourse; while the company of brethren is ill at ease, brethren, when Ananda is silent.'

9. *I.D.F.*, pp. 85-86.
10. *W.S.*, Vol. 3, p. 441.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 460.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 462.
13. E. A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, p. 127.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

2

Socio-Political Buddhism

Ambedkar's writings are socio-political rather than devotional and philosophical. I specifically have in mind the contents of the third, fourth, fifth and eighth volumes, in which he deals with the philosophy of Hinduism, the triumph of brāhmaṇism, riddles in Hinduism, untouchability, and Pakistan or the partition of India. Even when he blazes a new trail with his daring expositions of these religious themes, the essential approach is more socio-political than philosophical.

According to Buddhist texts, Amitabha achieved Buddhahood on the express condition that he could receive at death all who sincerely called upon his name and carried them to his Western Paradise. There, the texts reveal, they might pursue the quest for ultimate perfection under far happier auspices than when surrounded by the conditions of earthly existence. Ambedkar sincerely felt that if Amitabha's ideals were followed by one and all in India, especially by the pharisaical caste Hindus, they would all be carried along to his Western Paradise. Ambedkar had the same loving concern for the salvation of the untouchables as the compassionate Bodhisattvas had for the salvation of others. He would have repeated history by postponing his own entrance into Nirvana until all the untouchables had had the same privilege.

Ambedkar's writings and discourses which severely pillory the śāstras, the caste system and the obduracy of the misguided brāhmaṇs are symptomatic of the extent to which he found himself alienated from Hinduism. He was convinced that most of the members constituting the Hindu priestly class and other *savarṇas* were sunk irredeemably in ignorance and corruption, were iniquitous and revelled in torturing the achuts and in

treating them like slaves. Under the influence of Buddhism he would often dream of the pure land of Amitabha in which his untouchable brethren would have lived had there been no caste system, no brāhmaṇic śāstras, no Manu, and no Vedas. A literary cormorant in love with Buddhist scriptures, he must have come across the descriptions of this land—Sukhāvatī—which is the world system of the Lord Amitabha:

"And that world system Sukhāvatī, Ananda, emits many fragrant odours; it is rich in a great variety of flowers and fruits, adorned with jewel trees, which are frequented by flocks of various birds with sweet voices, which the Tathagata's miraculous power has conjured up. And these jewel trees, Ananda, have various colours, many colours, many hundreds of thousands of colours. They are variously composed of the seven precious things, in varying combinations, i.e. of gold, silver, beryl, crystal, coral, red, pearls, or emerald. Such jewel trees, and clusters of banana trees and rows of palm trees, all made of precious things, grow everywhere in this Buddha-field. On all sides it is surrounded with golden nets, and all around they are covered with lotus flowers made of all the precious things. Some of the lotus flowers are half a mile in circumference, others up to ten miles. And from each jewel lotus issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of rays. And at the end of each ray there issue thirty-six hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas, with golden-coloured bodies, who bear the thirty-two marks of the superman, and who, in all the ten directions, go into countless world systems, and there demonstrate Dharma.

"And further, Ananda, in this Buddha-field there are nowhere any mountains—black mountains, jewel mountains, Sumerus, kings of mountains, circular mountains or great circular mountains. But the Buddha-field is everywhere even, delightful like the palm of the hand, and in all its parts the ground contains a great variety of jewels and gems . . . .

"And many kinds of rivers flow along in this world system Sukhāvatī. There are great rivers there, one mile broad, and up to fifty miles broad and twelve miles deep. And all these rivers flow along calmly; their water is fragrant with manifold agreeable odours; in them there are bunches of flowers to which various jewels adhere, and they resound with various sweet

sounds. And the sound which issues from these great rivers is as pleasant as that of a musical instrument, which consists of hundreds of thousands of kotis of parts, and which, skilfully played, emits a heavenly music. It is deep, commanding, distinct, clear, pleasant to the ear, touching the heart, delightful, sweet, pleasant, and one never tires of hearing it; it always agrees with one and one likes to hear it, like the words 'Impermanent, peaceful, calm, and not-self'. Such is the sound that reaches the ears of these beings."[1]

But what Ambedkar saw around him was a bleak scene peopled with millions of slaves and their torturers, a stench of fear coming out of every pore of enslaved life. It is on this waste-land scene that Ambedkar appeared with his message of life-giving hope for the dalits and of Tathagata's compassion for one and all. But his compassion was saturated as much with love for the depressed classes as with hate and anger for the privileged, for the latter's injustices and iniquities. Like the Blessed One he saw all things around him on fire. There was fire of passion and of hatred in the eyes of the brāhmaṇs who were infatuated with the social privileges they enjoyed. They were so many social parasites ill in body and ill in mind. In the language of Theravada Buddhism, each of these brāhmaṇs was an unlearned common person, "who does not perceive the noble ones, who is unskilled and untrained in the noble doctrine, who does not perceive good men, who is unskilled and untrained in the doctrine of good men, looks upon his body as his self, thinking that his self consists of body or that his body is in his self or that his self is in his body, being possessed by the thought, 'I am body, body is mine'. The body of one possessed by this thought changes and becomes otherwise, and through the change and alteration of his body grief, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair arise."[2]

Ambedkar was no Buddha, though he must have desired to emulate the Buddhas who preached their thousands of sūtras and countless śāstras just for the sake of sentient beings lost in delusion. The brāhmaṇs were indeed lost in delusion, in self-deception; they were bound, in the language of Buddhism, to fall headlong into the evil states of rebirth. Thir delusion consisted in their belief that being born of their brāhmaṇ parents they were meritorious

brāhmaṇs. Unenlightened dupes! Sentient beings must save themselves, the Buddhas cannot do it for them. If they could, every single being must by now have been emancipated. The brāhmaṇs in their reliance upon the śāstras were still hoping to be saved by them, by their gods, by the merits earned by their gods, by the merits earned by their parents and ancestors. Ambedkar dispels such a delusion and declares that whatsoever is conducive to the welfare of sentient beings is right doctrine and that whatsoever is harmful to their welfare cannot be dharma.

Some of Ambedkar's fundamental concepts are in truth embedded in Buddhism; if not so they at least show the extent of the Buddhist influence on his mind and sensibility. Here are two extracts from 'The Tsung Ching Record of the Zen Master Hui Hai. Also Known as the Great Pearl', which provide the evidence for this affinity of influence:

1. Presently, the Venerable Yun Kuang asked some further questions.[3]

Q: 'Can spiritual wisdom spring from the great emptiness (t'ai hsü)? Is real mind the casual product of good and evil? Can those indulging their desires be on the Way? Can those clinging to right and wrong develop unimpeded use of mind? Can those in whom sense-impressions stir up mental pocesses achieve one-pointed concentration (ting)? Do people who remain constantly in motionless abstraction really possess wisdom? Do those who treat others with contempt really possess egos? Are those grasping at "is" and "is not" really wise? Men who seek realization through book-knowledge, men who seek the Buddha by means of austerities, men who stray from their minds in quest of Buddhahood and men who cling to mind's being the Buddha—are all these various people acting in accord with the Way? I beg you, Master, to reply to these points one by one.'

M: 'The great emptiness does not give birth to spiritual wisdom. Real mind is not the casual product of good and evil. Men whose evil desires lie deep have exceedingly shallow potentials. The minds of those clinging to right and wrong are obstructed. Those in whom sense-impressions stir up

mental processes seldom achieve one-pointed concentration. In those who remain constantly in a state of motionless abstraction, forgetful of the mysterious source of that stillness, wisdom is at a low ebb. Self-importance and contempt for others intensify the illusion of an ego. Those grasping at "is" and "is not" are stupid. Those who seek realization in book-knowledge pile up more obstructions for themselves. Those who seek the Buddha by means of austerities are all deluded. Those who stray from their minds in quest of Buddhahood are heretics. Those who cling to mind as being the Buddha are devils!'

A: 'If all that is so, ultimately, we find there is just nothing at all.'

M: 'We have come to the ultimate extent of yourself, Venerable Sir, but not to the ultimate.'

At this, the venerable monk, who was now filled with joy, hastened to prostrate himself in gratitude and departed.

2. Once our Master took his place in the assembly hall and said: 'It is far better for all of you to be unconcerned men. Why all this craze for karmic activities that will put felons' cangues about your necks and send you down to hell? Toiling and moiling the whole day through, telling people you are practising Ch'an and studying the Way, holding forth about your understanding of the Buddha-Dharma—this sort of thing is no use at all. It simply amounts to rushing about in pursuit of sounds and forms. Ah, when will you desist from it all? Once this poor monk heard the great Ma Tsu of Kiangsi say: "Your own treasure house contains absolutely everything you need. Use it freely instead of searching vainly for something outside yourself." From that day forward, I desisted. Making use of your own treasure house according to your needs—that can be called happiness! There is no single thing (dharma) which can be grasped or rejected. When you cease looking on things in their temporal aspect, and as having come or gone, then in the whole universe—above, below and round about—there will be no grain of anything which is not your own treasure. All you have to do is carefully to contemplate your own minds; then the marvellous trinity of Three Jewels in One

> Substance will constantly manifest itself; of this there is no shadow of doubt. Do not search for the truth with your intellects. Do not search at all. The nature of the mind is intrinsically pure. Therefore it is written in the Avataṁsaka Sūtra: "All things have no beginning; and all things have no end." Before those who are able to interpret these words correctly the Buddhas are ever present. Moreover, in the Vimalakīrti Sūtra it is written: "It is through your own bodies that Reality is perceived; the Buddha is perceived in the same manner." If you do not follow sounds and sights so that they stir your minds, and if you do not pursue appearances so that they give rise to discriminations, you will then be unconcerned men. Don't stand there for so long. Take good care of yourselves!"[4]

One of his charges against the brāhmaṇs was that they sought realization in their śāstras which deluded them by asking them to seek truth by means of austerities. The Buddha-Dharma did not encourage rushing about in pursuit of sounds and forms. Those who were slaves to their books—the Vedas, the Purāṇas, etc.—had forgotten the simple Buddhist doctrine that our own treasure-house contains absolutely everything we need. Instead of using his treasure-house freely the brāhmaṇ searched vainly for something outside himself.

Buddhism gave the untouchables the spiritual independence they had been deprived of; by rejecting the Hindu śāstras and exposing their irrelevance to the Buddha-Dharma, the oppressed masses at once became independent of those who prided themselves on their knowledge of the scriptures and whose contempt for those whom they had deprived of education had intensified the illusion of an ego.

Ambedkar's researches into the philosophy of Hinduism had led him to the philosophy of Nietzsche with which, he says, the former philosophy has some obvious affinity. Before his conversion to Buddhism he had read Nietzsche's well-known pronouncement on scepticism: "One should not be deceived: great spirits are skeptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic... Convictions are prisons."[5] Ambedkar, too, was convinced that where faith bound, doubt freed; it was necessary therefore to inculcate scepticism in

place of blind faith. That is one of the important doctrines he adopted—a doctrine that subsequently became one of the cardinal creeds of Ambedkarism. Intense doubt in Ambedkar transformed itself into passionate exploration and search, and stirred his vital forces within him to their depths, leading to the ruthless anatomies of brāhmaṇism. The pains of harbouring doubt were on some occasions the pains of childbirth as it were—of the birth of new ideas. Like Nietzsche, again, Ambedkar advocated freedom from religious dogmas and superstitious faith in rituals and observances, but he did not abandon his faith in spiritual values and in religion. He rejected Marxism on the ground that it went all out for establishing dictatorship bereft of spiritual values, and regarded religion as the opium of the masses. It is not necessary to remind oneself here that much of Ambedkar's polemics against Hinduism is reminiscent of Nietzche's against Christianity. Ambedkar takes some of the Hindu deities to task for their promiscuousness and libertinism and throws filth upon them to his heart's content.

Buddhism does not do so but Ambedkar introduced something of his own into Buddhism—a new socio-political element rather different from this element already existing in this faith. As his caste-ridden, nightmare world around him became increasingly terrifying and humiliating, only one course was left open to his sensitive, learned and civilized mind. He must turn within himself to find the honour, the prestige, the happiness for which he yearned and which the Hindu society dominated by brāhmaṇism prevented him from achieving. His harassed dalit brethren led a life of desperation that lacked the small solace, freedom.

When one beigns to understand Ambedkar's "Reformers and Their Fate" in the third volume of his published works and its implications, it becomes understandable why Buddhism, its philosophy, concept, attitude—call it what one will—has made such great impact on him, though he was born a Hindu.

As years had passed, he had not only experienced humiliation and insulation on account of his menial origin but had also imbibed in America and Europe a culture motivated by pragmatism and from the times,—the zeit-geist—a spirit motivated by scepticism. It is small wonder, therefore, that he turned towards

one who had realized the necessity of social reform in Hindu society. The first social reformer and the greatest of them all, he says, is Gautama Buddha, and claims that any history of social reform must begin with him. "Oppressed by the evils and misery then prevalent in the Aryan Society," Ambedkar adds, "he renounced the world at the age of twenty-nine and left his home in search for truth and deliverance." Though Ambedkar did not renounce his home, he, too, had experienced the oppression and misery prevalent in the Hindu society and was searching for deliverance from it. He did not become a mendicant like Gautama nor an ascetic like him. He knew that even Gautama had to give up asceticism as being futile. Referring to Gautama's attainment of Buddhahood, he observes: "By hard thinking he got insight into things and as a result of this insight he formulated his own *Dhamma*. This was at the age of thirty-five. The remainder of his eighty years he spent in spreading his *Dhamma* and founding and administering an order of monks. He died about the year 483 B.C. at Kusinara surrounded by his devoted followers."[6]

Ambedkar describes the Buddha in glowing terms and pays him the tribute none else has received from his pen:

> To the carrying out of his mission, the Buddha devoted all his days after the achievement of enlightenment. His time was divided between feeding the lamp of his own spiritual life by solitary meditation—just as Jesus spent hours in lonely prayer—and active preaching to large audiences of his monks, instructing the more advanced in the subtle points of inner development, directing the affairs of the Order, rubuking breaches of discipline, confirming the faithful in their virtue, receiving deputations, carrying on discussions with learned opponents, comforting the sorrowful, visiting kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcasts, rich and poor. He was a friend of publicans and sinners, and many a public harlot, finding herself understood and pitied, gave up her evil ways to take refuge in the "Blessed One". Such a life demanded variety of moral qualities and social gifts, and among others a combination of democratic sentiments with an aristocratic *Savoir Faire* which is seldom met with. In reading the dialogues one can never forget that Gotama had the birth and

> upbringing of an aristocrat. He converses not only with Brahmins and pundits but with princes and ministers and kings on easy and equal terms. He is a good diner-out, with a fund of anecdotes and apparently a real sense of humour, and is a welcome guest at every house.[7]

Ambedkar, so far from being the hide-bound belittler of great men he is sometimes made out to be, was not unconscious of Gautama's greatness. He honours him with due reverence and pays him his homage in enthusiastic and forcible fashion, with his accents on 'a friend of publicans and sinners', 'moral qualities and social gifts', 'democratic sentiments', 'on easy and equal terms'. Enlarging on these expressions, Ambedkar further describes the Blessed Reformer: "He was beloved of all. Repeatedly he is described or describes himself, as one born into the world for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, for the advantage, the good, the happiness of gods and men, out of compassion for the world."[8] He quotes Prof. Hopkins in support of what he has said about Buddha's magnetism, his charismatic personality and his no less charismatic teaching. He agrees with Hopkins that the Buddha was the friend of all, that he had appeared to make of slaves free men and of classes a brotherhood. Having stated the reason why Buddhism spread with inevitable rapidity and exercised profound influence on the people, he then provides a telling description of the degraded condition of the Aryan civilization at the time when the Buddha started on the mission of his life. The Aryans, by which he means the Hindus, of the Buddha's time were all steeped from head to foot in the worst kind of debauchery: social, religious, and spiritual. One of the social evils they gave themselves up to was gambling. It had infected kings and commoners alike. Another evil rampant among the Aryans was drinking of *soma* and *sura*, the former being a sacrificial wine permitted only to brāhmaṇs, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas. The habit of drinking, maintains Ambedkar, was common even among women of all classes. To show the veracity of this statement he cites a sentence from the *Kausitaki Grihya Sutra*: "Four or eight women who are not widowed after having been regaled with wine and food are to dance for four times on the night previous to the wedding ceremony." The society was marked by class wars and class

degradation. The four classes—the brāhmaṇs, the kṣatriyas, the vaiśyas and the śūdras—were not merely four horizontal divisions, all on a par with one another in the matter of social relationship; they had become vertical, one above the other. Being stationed vertically above or below they were jealous of one another and subject to internecine rivalry which often gave rise to enmity. The struggle between the brāhmaṇs and the kṣatriyas, says Ambedkar, was the bitterest as wars of extermination are. Of the several illustrations cited by him, one simple example is that of Paraśurām, a brāhmaṇ fighting against the kṣatriyas twenty-one times and killing everyone them. What is strange, if not mystifying, to Ambedkar is the fact that while the two classes were fighting among themselves for supremacy, they combined to keep down the vaiśyas and the śūdras, the former a milch cow for them and the latter a general beast of burden. Below these classes were the cāṇḍalas and swappakas, not untouchables but degraded classes outside the pale of society and of law. They had neither rights nor opportunities. They were, in the words of Ambedkar, 'the rejects of the Aryan society'.

When describing the moral degradation of the Aryans Ambedkar as a rule makes a pointed and scornful reference to their sexual immorality but he has many examples of this immorality to cite. One such example is that of Yami the sister inviting her brother Yama to cohabit with her. Another is that of Vasiṣṭha marrying his own daughter Satarupa when she came of age. He also refers, in characteristic vein, to the instances of grandfathers marrying their granddaughters and says, not on dubious authority, that the Aryans did not mind cohabiting with women in the open and within sight of people.

The picture of Aryan degradation is indeed so abhorring that it looks incredible, but, in condemning the Aryans on the scores of immorality and bestiality Ambedkar does not allow any statement to remain unillustrated and unsupported. What is most repellent to the modern taste is the Aryan practice of renting out women to others. Ambedkar mentions the Mahabharata story of Mādhavī as an illustration and then refers to Yayāti, a king who gave his daughter Mādhavī as an offering to his guru, Gālav, who rented out the girl to three kings each a period, thereafter giving her in marriage to Viśvāmitra. She remained with him,

adds Ambedkar, until a son was born to her. Thereafter Gālav took away the girl and returned her to her father, Yayāti.

The list of Aryan degradations does not come to an end here. Of many other social evils and practices rampant among the Aryans the most abysmally degrading were the following:

(i) procreation by the best among them or raising a family as though it were a breeding or stock raising;
(ii) bestiality;
(iii) yajñas as sacrifices—*soma* sacrifices and even animal sacrifices. (In the list of sacrificial animals man came first. The yajña often became a regular carnage of cattle.)

Concluding his account of the degraded condition of the Aryan civilization at the time of the Buddha, Ambedkar remarks with his customary vituperative eloquence: "The Aryan religion was just a series of observances. Behind these observances there was no yearning for a good and a virtuous life. There was no hunger or thirst for righteousness. Their religion was without any spiritual content. The hymns of the Rig Veda furnish very good evidence of the absence of any spiritual basis for the Aryan religion. The hymns are prayers addressed by the Aryans to their gods. What do they ask for in these prayers? Do they ask to be kept away from temptation? Do they ask for deliverance from evil? Do they ask for forgiveness of sins? Most of the hymns are in praise of Indra. They praise him for having brought destruction to the enemies of the Aryans. They praise him because he killed all the pregnant wives of Krishna, an Asura. They praise him because he destroyed hundreds of villages of the Asuras. They praise him because he killed lakhs of Dasyus. The Aryans pray to Indra to carry on greater destruction among the Anaryans in the hope that they may secure to themselves the food supplies of the Anaryans and the wealth of the Anaryans. Far from being spiritual and elevating, the hymns of the Rig-Veda are saturated with wicked thoughts and wicked purposes. The Aryan religion never concerned itself with what is called a righteous life."[9]

This theme of Aryan degradation appears frequently in Ambedkar literature—so frequently and in so provocative a manner that it may be said to constitute one of the shaping and

controlling ideas of his writings. I can identify it by calling it the disenchantment of Ambedkar with Hindu civilization itself—it seems to me that the characteristic element of Ambedkar's writings, or at least of the most powerful of his writings, is the bitter line of hostility to Hinduism which runs through them. It happens that his awareness of this Aryan degradation is involved, as I have pointed out earlier, in a personal experience, and he is therefore impelled to speak of this all-round degradation not abstractly but as it actually existed for him, with the husks of his experience clinging untidily to it. If he uses some coarse epithets, if even a Buddhist debates and denounces an institution with his daring expressions, his bitterness cannot be wholly unbecoming to him. It is not unbecoming to a sufferer to talk about the instrument of his suffering. And he goes so far in doing this as to describe not only the actual circumstances in which he was persistently humiliated but also a whole civilization on account of which his community suffered social degradation. He, a Mahar, has seen from his early childhood how the Mahars were treated by the caste Hindus. Eleanor Zelliot gives a graphic description of this treatment in these words: "Mahars are found in almost every village of Maharashtra, always in minority. Their quarters, called the *maharwada*, are set apart, usually east of the village proper. A Marathi proverb, *jethe gao tethe maharwada* (wherever there is a village, there is a maharwada), underlines their prevalence and also their low status, since it is used idiomatically to mean the equivalent of the English proverb, 'There's a black sheep in every flock . . . .'

"The Mahar's duties were performed in the context of his untouchability, his touch was polluting and he did not come into direct contact with a caste Hindu or enter a caste Hindu home. The temple, the school, the village well were closed to him. Some restrictions in clothing, ornaments, metal house-hold wares and the observance of ceremonies seem to have been enforced. The Mahar role in village festivals was clearly specified and generally, though not always, indicative of his inferior status. The Mahar practice of eating the carrion beef of the carcasses which were his charge, an early target of the Mahar reformers, was justification, in the mind of the caste Hindu, for his untouchability."[10]

We know from the *Sutras* of Vasiṣṭha that dining in the same row with people of other castes than one's own was forbidden. One of Apastamba's injunctions to a brahman student, who has returned home, is that he must not eat sitting in the same row with unworthy people. That brāhmaṇs followed this rule is confirmed by the following passage:

> The idea that an impure person imparts pollution by his touch and even by his near approach to a member of the first three castes finds definite expression in the law-texts of this period, generally with reference to the persons who are outcasted and even specifically in relation to a class of people called Chandālas. According to Gautama a man who is guilty of the crime of killing a brāhmiṇ, must live outside the village, entering it only for alms. When he thus enters the village he must step out of the road on meeting a member of the first three castes and make the way clear for him. On touching a Chandāla or one who has touched a Chandāla one must immediately bathe with one's clothes on. If a brāhmiṇ unintentionally eats the food or accepts the presents given by a Chandāla he is outcast. But if he does so knowingly he becomes equal to a Chandāla. The position of the Chandālas must have been very degraded. A householder is exhorted to throw some food for them and the outcastes along with that for crows and dogs outside the house, after all the members of the household have taken their meals. In marked contrast stands the practice of people about the 2nd century or even the 5th century B.C. For no less a careful student of linguistic usage than Patanjali, while explaining a rule in Panini's grammar, imparts us the valuable information that the Chandālas were considered to be a variety of Shudras, not necessarily the last. That they were not outcast in the sense of having to live outside the limits of town or village is implied; and that they were outcast only as far as the use of their food-vessels by members of the twice born orders was concerned is explicitly stated. They were the 'apapātra Shudras' or simply 'apapatras', a term later used by Manu, too, about the Chandālas. The vessels used by them for taking their food could not be cleansed by any process to

make them fit for use by the twice-born. This definite and clearcut information supplied by the great grammarian writing in about 150 B.C. is impliedly corroborated by the clever administrator Kautilya a few centuries later. The latter forbids the Chandālas to follow the custom of the Shudras. By implication one may conclude that the Chandālas were for some time at least following the customs of the Shudras, because they were actually considered to be a variety of them."[11]

What the author says here is the opinion almost unanimously held by Indian and foreign sociologists and historians. The excerpt contains conventional reasons why movements against caste arose and why a large number of Mahars became Buddhists. Ambedkar holds Manu, the guiding-star of brāhmaṇical fanaticism, responsible for such a treatment of the outcasts. To Manu's are also added the names of the law-givers. Academic researches have now begun to question the dependence of the social historian solely on the evidence furnished by Manu's work. It is now held that Manu's passages "bearing on the position of the śūdras can be scrutinised in the light of information gleaned from the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali, the dramas of Bhāsa and the Buddhist works such as the *Questions of Milinda*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mahāvastu* and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*. A Jain work known as the *Pannavaṇā*, which supplies valuable information about artisans, may be also ascribed to this period. Memorial and votive inscriptions of this period also throw welcome sidelights on the position of the śūdra community."[12]

That Ambedkar saw no trace of casteism in Buddhist teachings is plain, for the Buddhist texts I have quoted earlier provide evidence that the Buddha being an equalitarian favoured no caste gradation. Some recent studies, however, question the authenticity of such an attitude to the Buddha. G. S. Ghurye's is one such study in which it is stated that "a close student of the early literature of these religious movements will feel convinced that the chief social aim of the writers was the assertion of the pre-eminence of the Kshatriyas. It is a well-known fact that no Jain Tirthamkara was ever born in any but a Kshatriya family. In Buddhist literature there are several examples where

the enumeration of the four castes is headed by the Kshatriya, the Brahmin coming next. Many a time the Kshatriyas aggressively put forward claims for prior recognition over the Brahmins. E.J. Thomas observes: 'The claim of the Shākyas to belong to the best caste, that of the warriors, is well-known; and though in the discourses the Brahmins are treated respectfully, their claims are criticized and rejected'. To Buddha himself is ascribed the saying that along with the Kshatriyas the Brahmins take precedence over the other castes in the matter of marks of respect to be shown to one's social superiors. A legend tells us that Buddha, in one of his previous incarnations, wavered as to whether he should be reborn as a Brahmin or a Kshatriya and decided in favour of the latter alternative as the Kshatriya class was then regarded as higher than the Brahmin. In one of Buddha's discourses there is a dialogue between Buddha and Ambattha, Brahmin student, in which the latter is represented as having acknowledged the fact that a Kshatriya's son by a Brahmin wife would be recognized as a Brahmin by the Brahmins but not by the Kshatriyas, because the latter accorded equal status only to the full-blooded Kshatriyas. Though the work *Lalitavistara* falls in the third period, some of its traditional statements may be taken as valid for this. According to it Bodhisattvas are not born in low families like those of Chandālas, Rathakāras, Venukāras or Pukkasas. They take birth only in families of the two classes of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. They choose either of the two classes for their birth according as the ruling order of the age prefers a Brahmin teacher or a Kshatriya one. Buddha's age being decidedy the age of Kshatriya teachers, he chose a Kshatriya family."[13]

I have already shown how Ambedkar avidly needed a new faith and was led to it through the excellence of the egalitarian teachings of the Buddha. We should further realize that the person who does avidly need a new faith does not, on finding it, take into account a stray evidence or two militating against his conviction. Ambedkar was convinced that for a Buddhist caste has nothing to do with success in life, material or otherwise, or with reward after death. No less convinced was he that in Buddhistic literature high caste is also depicted as being on par with other castes insofar as the effect of wrong doing is concerned.

Everybody, or at any rate nearly everybody, knows that to an ascetic caste ought to be a matter of utter indifference. G. S. Ghurye refers to a *Jataka* story which ends with the declaration from the Bodhisattva that the virtuous do not ask one about his birth if his piety is well-known. Whatever be the attitude of the modern scholar towards the Buddhistic literature on caste, there is overwhelming evidence to prove that to it, a person's worth in life must be determined by right conduct and knowledge. The Buddha might have been inclined to accept the caste divisions, but he based them only on the individual's actions and not on his birth.[14] Caste hierarchy would have received a mortal blow had not Buddhism subsequently given way to brāhmaṇism. Ambedkar reminds us that Indian history "is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism. So neglected is this truth that no one will be found to give it his ready acceptance. Indeed there may not be wanting persons who would repudiate any such suggestion."[15]

It needs no reminder that with the triumph of brāhmaṇism the solid wall dividing one caste from another became all the more impregnable. In spite of so many legislative, administrative and executive safeguards, the scheduled castes continued to be deprived of social justice. Ghurye's summing-up of the situation reflects Ambedkar's own views though expressed in different words: "As long as endogamy is prescribed and practised, wider self-interest dictates that one should help the aggrandisement of the members of one's caste. For, the better the economic prospects for the youths of the caste the greater the chances of getting well-to-do husbands for one's daughters. The rule of endogamy is in a way the fundamental factor of contemporary caste.

"Caste has thus become the centre of an individual's altruistic impulse and philanthropic activities. The existence of definite organization has rallied round the caste the feelings of consciousness of kind. In the desire to help one's fellows many forget the principles of social justice, and are led to do, consciously or otherwise, injustice to the members of other castes. Unfortunately many leaders in civic life are associated with the movement of amelioration of their respective castes. The mental undercurrents of those who are to be led breathe distrust of such leaders. The conduct of these leaders in the matter of the marriages of their

wards usually in their own caste—strengthens this lack of confidence felt by the populace, and acts as a buttress against the attacks on caste-endogamy. Hardly any caste accepts its accredited status or concedes the precedence of another caste, though it may demand such precedence of a caste supposed to be lower than it in the old hierarchy."[16]

Notes

1. E.A. Burtt, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-08.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
3. 'M' stands for 'The Master' while 'Q' and 'A' stand for the questions and answers of others.
4. John Blofeld, (tr.), *The Zen Teaching of Hui Hai* (New York, 1972), pp. 97-99.
5. Quoted by Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, 1950), p. 70.
6. *W.S.*, Vol. 3, pp. 165-66.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-76.
10. Rajni Kothari (ed.), *Caste in Indian Politics* (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 30-31.
11. G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Bombay, 1986), pp. 79-80.
12. R.S. Sharma, *Śūdras in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1990), pp. 191-92.
13. G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
15. *W.S.*. Vol. 3, p. 267.
16. G.S. Ghurye, *op. cit.* pp. 302-03.

3

The Thunderbolt Strikes

"Explosions", says Evgeni Zamyatin, "are not comfortable things. That is why the exploders, the heretics, are quite rightly annihilated by fire, by axes, and by words. Heretics are harmful to everybody today, to every evolution, to the difficult, slow, useful, so very useful, constructive process of coral reef building; imprudently and foolishly they leap into today from tomorrow. They are romantics. It was right and proper that in 1797 Babeuf had his head cut off: he had leaped into 1797, skipping one hundred and fifty years. It is equally right and proper that heretical literature, literature that is damaging to dogma, should also have its head cut off: such literature is harmful."[1] Though in many ways the exact opposite of Francois Babeuf (1760-1997), the French revolutionary who was executed for plotting to overthrow the government by force, Ambedkar was like him an exploder and, to the millions of the orthodox Hindus, a pronounced heretic who deserved to be annihilated by fire, by axes, and by words. He was harmful to every Hindu institution, every Hindu cause, to the Vedas, to the great Hindu seers; imprudently and foolishly, they thought, he had leapt into today perhaps from tomorrow. In essence he was a romantic revolutionary, a dreamer, if not an anarchist who went on destroying the very fundamentals of the Vedic culture. His writings, to misguided Hindus, are essentially heretical, writings that are damaging to dogma and should therefore have their heads chopped off: such writings are thunderbolts. But, to quote Evgeni Zamyatin again, "harmful literature is more useful than useful literature: because it is anti-entropic, it militates against calcification, sclerosis, encrustedness, moss, peace. It is utopian and ridiculous."[2] Ambedkar had realized the

futility of all measures adopted by his predecessors to annihilate the hierarchy of caste. He had seen the brāhmaṇs, so thoroughly debauched, at the apex of the hierarchical system and the government—the British—indifferent to it 'except where the peculiar institutions of the country egregiously violated their cherished ideas of government'. Some of the decisions of the High Courts had, however, aimed at dislodging the brāhmaṇs from their hereditary and prescriptive monopoly of priesthood. In Bengal, in North India, in the Madras Presidency and in the Maratha country priestly office ceased to be recognized as such in law and many non-brāhmaṇ reformists appeared determined to start the practice of performing their rites and rituals unaided by the brāhmaṇ priests. When these priests asked for an injunction against the reformists the Bombay High Court gave its judgement in favour of the non-brāhmaṇs, decreeing that people were free to engage any priest they liked. The Castes-Disabilities Removal Act (1850) had not done away with civil disabilities existing between one caste and another. The only achievement to its credit was that it facilitated conversion from one religion to another and from one caste to another caste with the proviso that a person would not forfeit his ordinary rights of property if he changed his caste or religion. A memorable event of 1872 was the Special Marriage Act, according to which an Indian of any caste or creed could enter into a valid marriage with a person belonging to any caste or creed on the condition that the contract of marriage was registered by the parties, declaring *inter alia* that they did not belong to any religion.

Ambedkar, an omnivorous reader and acknowledged master of jurisprudence, was aware of the superficiality of all such Acts or their subsequent amendments.[3] The reformists were busy tackling issues that were not as vital as the question of untouchability. What were they doing for the degraded millions devoid of many of the civil rights? It was certainly encouraging to find a press-note announcing in 1858 that "although the Governor-in-Council does not contemplate the introduction of low-caste pupils into schools, the expenses of which are shared with Government by local contributors and patrons who object to such a measure, he reserves to himself the full right of refusing the support of Government to any partially aided school in which the benefits

of education are withheld from any class of persons on account of caste or race, and further resolves that all schools maintained at the sole cost of Government shall be open to all classes of its subjects without distinction."[4] In spite of this press-note the traditional ideas about untouchability continued to persist, a fact corroborated by the press-note of 1915 which refers to the "familiar sight of Mahar and other depressed-class boys in village schools where the boys are often not allowed to enter the schoolroom but are accommodated outside the room on the verandah."

Not without some significance is the Government's resolution of 1923 which said that no grants would be made to any aided educational institution which refused admission to the depressed-class children. The non-brāhmaṇ leaders were agitating for special representation for their members both in the administrative bodies and in the services. The then Mahārājā of Kolhāpur made a strong case for this special representation when Montague came to India. In the Reformed Constitution framed by Montague and Lord Chelmsford the depressed classes got special representation in local and legislative bodies by nomination.

Were these piecemeal and sporadic efforts of any use in eradicating untouchability or in liquidating the caste system? It is admitted that one of the most widely recognized consequences of the promulgation of a uniform law and of certain administrative measures was the removal of legal inequality. It is also admitted that the British Government did not recognize caste as a unit empowered to administer justice, but, as Ghurye has pointed out, in the case of the depressed castes the Government did not proceed to the logical end with the result that they continued to be denied access to Hindu temples. The fact was that caste, in spite of the Government's efforts, retained its cultural integrity. There is evidence also of the British Administration providing more than sufficient incentive for the consolidation of the caste groups. One such aspect was the census of 1901 under the guidance of Sir Herbert Risley of ethnographic fame. He had chosen a procedure which enabled various ambitious castes to perceive the chances of raising their status and to invite for this purpose conferences of their members. They also formed councils which were expected to take steps to see to it that they acquired

an honourable status. There was no valid reason indeed for such an elaborate treatment of the caste groups by the Census Commissioner. It is somewhat disappointing to find that the activities of the British Government did not go very far towards the solution of the caste problem. As a matter of fact, most of these activities were dictated by administrative prudence rather than by any sincere desire to eradicate the system. The British rulers do not appear to have given much thought to the problem of caste insofar as it affected the nationhood of India. Instead of realizing the importance of effective and daring action in the matter, they showed no willingness at all to take some bold steps to render caste innocuous. After the Rising of 1857 the Government had in fact adopted the policy of dividing and separating into distinct bodies the nationalities and castes constituting the Indian army. The special commission appointed to suggest a reorganization of the Indian army recommended that "The Native Indian army should be composed of different nationalities and castes and as a general rule mixed promiscuously through each regiment." "It is well to remember in this connection," remarks G.S. Ghurye, "that even the Roman Church, in its desire to propagate its faith, was prepared to accommodate caste in its practical programme, though it was opposed to the humanitarian principles of the Church. Pope Gregory XV published a bull sanctioning caste regulations in the Christian Churches of India."[5]

Such then were the forces strengthening the stranglehold of the caste system. But men and institutions, some of tremendous popular influence, had strained themselves to the utmost to nullify these forces and worked in the opposite direction—to loosen this stranglehold. The most important of these egalitarian forces was the casteless culture which the British themselves had brought with their literature overflowing with their ideal of individual liberty. With the spread of English education many of the intelligent minds of the country came in intimate contact with the religion and culture of the rulers and, thus inspired, such outstanding trail-blazers as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore started movements which preached and practised the brotherhood of man. Institutions like the Brahmo Samaj, the Bombay Prarthana Samaj, etc. were all active, throwing caste hierarchies overboared. The Arya Samaj movement of Swami

Dayananda in its programme of reconstruction of the Hindu society allowed the śūdras to study the Vedas. It must, however, be pointed out here that the institutions like the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay while professing anti-caste ideals busied themselves with furthering their own caste interests.

The Samajists were mostly caste Hindus and mere ameliorists. Their failure demonstrated to Ambedkar the tenacious hold of Manu, the reality of caste. What was needed was not a mere reformer or even a saintly Gandhi; but a militant like Jotirao Phooley of Poona who founded the Satyaśodhak Samāj 'with the purpose of asserting the worth of man irrespective of caste'. He revolted against the tyranny of caste system, exhorted the non-brāhmaṇs to give up the practice of engaging brāhmaṇ priests, and started in1851 a primary school for the untouchable children. His "was a revolt against caste in so far as caste denied ordinary human rights to all the members of Hindu society, and not merely a non-brāhmaṇ movement to cast off the domination of the brāhmaṇs. In his writings he demanded representation for all classes of the Hindus in all the local bodies, the services, and the institutions. The movement did not receive any support from the brāhmaṇs in general. Only stray individuals like Ranade showed sympathy with it. Even among the non-brāhmaṇs the progress of Phooley's ideas was slow. It was the late Maharaja of Kolhapur who infused new life into the agitation, so much so that Montague and Chelmsford, in their Indian political reforms, had to grant the demands."[6]

Most of the reformers—the Samajists—were happy in their speculation that progress was possible within Hinduism itself. Herein lies the difference between them on the one hand and Ambedkar on the other. The failure of the former, of all religion-centred activity, prepared the 'western-educated Ambedkar' and his Mahars to reject Hinduism altogether. They had as a source of caste pride the figure of Chokhamela, not a mere 'stimulant to claiming a place of worth in the Hindu hierarchy'. A poem composed by Kisan Faguzi Bansode (1879-1946), a labour leader and a poet, is symptomatic of an attitude as militant as Ambedkar's:

Why do you endure curses?
Choka went into the temple resolutely,

Why do you, ashamed, stay far off?
You are the descendants of Choka.
Why do you fear to enter the temple?
Brace yourself like a wrestler, come,
Together let us conquer pollution.[7]

All this is pedestrian without any trace of genuine creative fire. It is Bansode's attitude, however, that is daring and advance-guard and the poem owes its effect to its remarkable clarity and heroic sentiment.

Of Ambedkar's contribution to the general awakening of the untouchables and his place among the leaders of the depressed classes there can be no question. To that political awakening which is no less than a sort of Mahar Renascence "military service and other contacts with the British, employment opportunities outside the village patterns, the beginnings of education, provided at first by caste Hindu reformers and Christian missions and from the 1920's onward at least in part by their own efforts; a latent caste spirit stimulated by reminders of their military past and the religious worth of Chokhamela,"[8] all alike contributed; but it was Dr. Ambedkar, 'a highly educated leader. . .capable of forming them into a political force', who 'equipped them for the use of political means toward a modern goal of social equality'.[9] He shared with Kisan Faguji Bansode the faculty of the great reformer of penetrating to fundamental issues while ostensibly treating of social matters alone. Thus he represents to the depressed classes the true line of Messiahs who appear for the redemption of mankind from time to time, not only by awakening them to fight for their rights, or by dispelling illusions concerning Hinduism, but also by forcing their countrymen to recognise the claims of the dalits to equality and even of women—all matters which had long remained but imperfectly implemented. That Ambedkar's anti-brāhmaṇic statements are sometimes provacative and that he is somewhat captious in his judgement of Hinduism, such things as these may be conceded. On the other hand there are his practical efforts both in England and in India to secure more and more rights for his dalit brethren, his inspiring exhortations to fight for the establishment of an egalitarian society, and not least, his timely reminder of the true

meaning of democracy and of one man, one value. Moreover, all is communicated in volume after volume with a fervour and sincerity that free his expression from passing fashions and give to his style a dignity and elevation of its own.

He was not only highly educated but was also imbued with a rare dedication to parliamentary democracy. It is not surprising therefore to find that he was able to guide the political awareness of the Mahars into effective channels. Eleanor Zelliot recalls how Ambedkar's "education both enabled him to speak in modern political terms and won him the respect and admiration of his caste. By the time the Southborough Committee hearings took place, Ambedkar was a graduate of Elphinstone College, had spent three years at Columbia University and one year at the London School of Economics. His higher education was made possible by the financial support of the Gaikwad of Baroda. He returned to India in 1917 and was a professor at Sydenham College at the time of Southborough Committee meetings. Later he resumed his London studies with the help of the Maharajah of Kolhapur as well as his own savings, secured a D.Sc. from London University and was called to the Bar in 1923. His degrees indicated an accomplishment rare for an Indian, almost incredible for an Untouchable. The Mahar reaction is shown by a song about Ambedkar, part of an enormous Mahar-Buddhist-Ambedkar song literature, that begins by listing his degrees: B.A., M.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., Bar-at-Law, in a sort of incantation."[10]

In order to appreciate the relevance and importance of his contribution to the emancipation of the segregated masses, his evidence before the Southborough Committee must first be recalled. He made it clear that the very word 'untouchable' was an epitome of the ills and sufferings of those who bore this label. "Not only has untouchability arrested the growth of their personality," he sincerely deposed, "but also it comes in the way of their material well-being. It has also deprived them of certain civil rights. For instance, in Konkan the untouchables are prohibited from using the public road. If some high caste man happens to cross him, he has to be out of the way and stand at such a distance that his shadow will not fall on the high-caste man. The untouchable is not even a citizen. Citizenship is a bundle of rights such as (1) personal liberty, (2) personal security, (3) rights

to hold private property, (4) equality before law, (5) liberty of conscience, (6) freedom of opinion and speech, (7) right of assembly, (8) right of representation in a country's Government, and (9) right to hold office under the state. The British Government by gradual growth may be said to have conceded these rights, at least in theory, to its Indian subjects. The right of representation and the right to hold office under the state are the two most important rights that make up citizenship. But the untouchability of the untouchables puts these rights far beyond their reach. In a few places they do not even possess such insignificant rights as personal liberty and personal security, and equality before law is not always assured to them. These are the interests of the untouchables."[11] He made it clear that these interests could be represented by the untouchables alone. Being distinctively their own interests, none else could truly voice them. A free-trade interest, he added, could be voiced by a brāhman, a Mohammedan or a Maratha equally well, but none of these could speak for the interests of the untouchables for the simple reason that they were not untouchables. "Untouchability," Ambedkar adds, "constitutes a definite set of interests which the untouchables alone can speak for. Hence it is evident that we must find the untouchables to represent their grievances which are their interests and, secondly, we must find them in such numbers as will constitute a force sufficient to claim redress."[12]

The Mahar political movement never gave up the theory, propounded by Ambedkar at the first All-India Conference convened by the untouchables at Nagpur later in 1920 before his return to England, that the caste Hindu could not know the mind of the untouchable, and hence could not lead him. The evidence before the Southborough Committee contains a detailed account of the sufferings and disabilities of the untouchables, in the light of which Ambedkar's political demands are seen to be both sensible and timely. He sets out to explain, first, why the untouchables had made no moral and material progress; and he begins by pointing out that the very untouchability attached to their person was a hindrance to this progress. "The principal modes of acquiring wealth," he says, dilating, "are trade, industry or service. The untouchables can engage in none of these because of their untouchability. From an untouchable

trader no Hindu will buy. An untouchable cannot be engaged in lucrative service. Military service had been the monopoly of the untouchables since the days of the East India Company. They had joined the Army in such large numbers that the Marquis Tweedledale in his note which he submitted to the Indian Army Commission of 1859 wrote: 'It should never be forgotten that India was conquered with the help of the low-caste men'. But after the mutiny when the British were able to secure soldiers from the ranks of the Marathas, the position of the low-caste men who had been the prop of the Bombay Army became precarious, not because the Marathas were better soldiers but because their theological bias prevented them from serving under low-caste officers. The prejudice was so strong that even the non-caste British had to stop recruitment from the untouchable classes. In like manner, the untouchables are refused service in the Police Force."[13] A great many of the government offices were closed to the untouchables. The factories also observed a distinction and the weaving departments of the cotton mills refused to admit them though many of them were professional weavers. Even the most cosmopolitan city of Bombay which was ruled by a corporation had two different sets of schools—one for the untouchable children and the other for the children of the touchables. What was really shocking was that, following the division of schools, the corporation had divided its teaching staff into untouchables and touchables. Ambedkar concedes that some of the untouchable schools were manned by teachers from the touchable class where the untouchable teachers were short of the demand, but the 'heart-killing fun of it', he points out, was that if there was a higher grade open in the untouchable school service, a touchable teacher could be thrust into the grade. But, surprisingly and shockingly, if a higher grade was open in the touchable school service, no untouchable teacher could be thrust into that grade. Such, he adds, rather mournfully, was the ethics of the Hindu social life. "Under it if the untouchables are poor, the committee, it may be hoped, will not deny them representation because of their small electoral roll but will see its way to grant them adequate representation to enable the untouchables to remove the evil conditions that bring about their poverty. At present when all the avenues of acquiring wealth are closed, it is unwise to re-

quire from the untouchables a high property qualification. To deny them the opportunities of acquiring wealth and then to ask from them a property qualification is to add insult to injury."[14]

This epitomizes Ambedkar's feelings about the untouchables in January 1919. In an article written to *The Times of India* under the pseudonym of 'A Mahar', he had demanded Home Rule for his men, declaring, "Home Rule is the birth-right as much of the Mahars as that of the Brahmins. The Depressed Classes have first to be elevated." The year (1919) also witnessed an order of far-reaching importance issued by the Maharaja of Kolhapur to the effect that untouchability should not be observed in the matter of education in schools, in offices and in such places of public utility as wells and *dharmashalas*. The Maharaja, an equalitarian to the core, also ordered the closure of separate schools for the children of the untouchables. Of outstanding importance, however, was the Mahad conference of 1927 at which Ambedkar declared, "Ours is a movement which aims at not only removing our own disabilities, but also at bringing about a social revolution that will remove all man-made barriers of caste by providing equal opportunities to all to rise to the highest position and making no distinction between man and man so far as civic rights are concerned. . ."[15] It was at this conference that a copy of *Manusmṛti*, Manu's law book symbolizing Hindu injustice to the untouchables, was publicly and ceremoniously burnt by the untouchables ascetics. A year earlier the book was burnt at a non-brāhmaṇ conference in the Madras Presidency, a fact stated by Ambedkar himself in the course of the evidence he gave in the Chavdar Tank case in the Mahad civil court on April 2,1930.

Most of these details are fortunately available in the scores of biographies which aim at providing a first-hand description of Ambedkar's social and political activities. Then, too, comments on other aspects of his personality have come from other quarters, not least significant of them being those which have come from the Ambedkarians like justice V.R. Krishna Iyer. Ambedkar's own writings leave no doubt about his zealous and untiring crusade against all social iniquities and caste—Hindu and brāhmaṇic tyrannies. He did not tire of appealing to the caste Hindus to help the untouchables secure their civic rights, to the Government to pass laws prohibiting the untouchables from eating carrion,

enforcing prohibition and providing free and compulsory education. His nomination to the Round Table Conference was a glaring acknowledgement of the popularity and leadership he had acquired. It was then that he had declared, "It is only in a Swaraj constitution that you stand any chance of getting the political power into your own hands without which you cannot bring salvation to your people."

From his role at the Nagpur Conference it would at any rate appear that he was in favour of joint electorates on the condition that there was adult franchise as well as reserved seats. In 1919, however, he had pleaded for separate electorates, but in 1928 he appears to have made a volte-face before the Simon Commission. Here he pleaded for joint electorates, thus expressing an ambivalent attitude towards this important issue. As yet, perhaps, he had not formulated any clear conception of the kind of electorates that would be beneficial to the depressed classes. But it was clear at the same time that his 'goal was direct, effective representation; the method of achieving that goal varied with the circumstances'. Somewhat clearer, though still indefinite, was his stand at the Round Table Conference where he again reversed his position with regard to electorates. Accounting for such reversals of attitude towards a living issue, Eleanor Zelliot assumes that

> Perhaps under a sense of representing all Depressed Classes, most of whom wanted separate electorates, perhaps because communal electorates for Muslims seemed to be guaranteed, perhaps because Gandhi would not even concede that reserved seats for Untouchables were necessary, Ambedkar came out strongly for separate electorates for the Depressed Classes and held to his position through the three Round Table sessions. From this time on, 'separate electorates' was the battle-cry of the Untouchables under Ambedkar's leadership until Independence.[16]

It was at the Second Round Table Conference that Ambedkar found himself faced with the undeniable fact that the untouchables had no use for Gandhi, for the latter did not attach as much importance to the eradication of untouchability as he did to popularize khadi or to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity. Had

Gandhi worked for the removal of untouchability, Ambedkar felt, he would certainly have insisted on it as a 'precondition for entrance into Congress as he has insisted on thread spinning as a precondition for voting in Congress'. With due impartiality and in a tone expressive of his sense of respect, Ambedkar also admitted that "when no one else comes near us, even Mahatma Gandhi's sympathy is of no little importance." At the Nagpur Conference held in 1930, Ambedkar was heard again lauding Gandhi's moral influence on the struggle the untouchables were waging for their rights. Only a year later, in 1931, however, Ambedkar found himself opposing Gandhi who was hell-bent on denying the recognition of the depressed classes as a minority. The following passage contributed to Ambedkar's paper, *Janata*, by the General Secretary of the Depressed Classes Institute, S.N. Shivtarkar, at the conclusion of the Third Round Table Conference characterizes Ambedkar's own attitude to the Congress and Gandhi at this time:

> In spite of the fact that the removal of untouchability has been included in the constructive programme of the Congress, practically nothing has been done so far by the body to achieve that object, and in our fights against untouchability at Mahad and Nasik, most of the local Congress leaders have been our bitter opponents.
> Gandhiji was prepared to concede (at the Round Table Conference) on behalf of the Congress special claims of the Mohammedans and the Sikhs including their demand for separate representation on 'historic grounds', but he was not willing even to concede reserved seats in general electorates to the depressed classes, although he knew, at least he ought to have known, what sort of treatment they would get, should they be thrown at the mercies of the caste Hindus. The greatest presumption on Gandhi's part at the Round Table Conference was that he claims that *he* represented the depressed classes and not Dr. Ambedkar . . . Leadership cannot be imposed, it must be accepted by those on whose behalf it is claimed. The Congress is now dissecting the community of untouchables by playing one section of that community against the other.[17]

The row between Ambedkar and Gandhi was inevitable because while Ambedkar used politics as a means to achieve social and economic equality for the advancement of the untouchables, Gandhi continued with his usual tenacity to hold to the traditional concept of the *varṇa* system, purged of untouchability, a system in which even while remaining śūdras, the untouchables could do their unclean work with due honour.

The reason why the two political vanguards represented two distinct ideologies, group norms and standards was obvious. While Gandhi was determined to prevent the untouchables from getting their claim to special representation and feared that the British Government might grant them this right notwithstanding the threat he had held out while at the Round Table Conference to resist it with his own life, Ambedkar was determined to fight tooth and nail to secure separate electorates for the untouchables. In a letter written on March 11, 1932 to Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Secretary of State for India, Gandhi had said: "I need hardly reiterate all the objections I have to the creation of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. I feel as if I was one of them. Their case stands on a wholly different footing from that of others. I am not against their representation in the legislatures. I should favour everyone of their adults, male and female, being registered as voters irrespective of education or property qualification, even though the franchise test may be stricter for others. But I hold that separate electorates is (sic) harmful for them and for Hinduism, whatever it may be from the purely political standpoint. To appreciate the harm that separate electorates would do them one has to know how they are distributed amongst the so-called caste Hindus and how dependent they are on the latter. So far as Hinduism is concerned, separate electorate would simply vivisect and disrupt it."[18]

For Gandhi the question of the depressed classes was not political but 'predominantly moral and religious'. Aware as he was of its political importance, he made it clear that this aspect of the question had paled into insignificance compared to the moral and religious issue. He reminded Sir Samuel that his feelings in the matter could be appreciated by remembering that he had been interested in the condition of the depressed classes from his boyhood. He had, he added with genuine pride, more

than once staked his all for their sake and felt that no penance that the Hindus might do could in any way compensate for the calculated degradation to which they had consigned the depressed classes for centuries. Continuing in the same vein, he made it clear that separate electorate was neither a penance nor any remedy for the 'crushing degradation' these classes had been groaning under. It was on this account, he asserted, that he had respectfully informed His Majesty's Government that in the event of their decision allowing separate electorate to be created for the depressed classes, he would fast unto death. Such a step, Gandhi admitted, would be regarded by many as highly improper or even as hysterical, but all he could urge in effect was that for him the contemplated step was not a political method or a strategy but part of his being. It was, he announced, the call of conscience which he dared not disobey, even though it might cost him whatever reputation for sanity he might possess.

Gandhi's threat went unheeded. Perhaps he had assumed that a repetition of his threat was sufficient to prevent the British Government from accepting the claim of the untouchables for special representation. Gandhi realized the failure of his threat when the terms of the Communal Awards were announced on Augugt 17, 1932. Still in Yervada Central Prison, he tried to get the terms of the Communal Award revised and, addressing a letter to the Prime Minister on August 18, he reiterated that he would resist the Government's decision with his life and that he would do so 'by declaring a perpetual fast unto death from food of any kind save water with or without salt and soda'. He added with due humility that his fast would cease if during its progress the British Government revised their decision and withdrew their scheme of communal electorates for the depressed classes. He regretted the decision he had taken, but, he reminded the Prime Minister, as a man of religion that he held himself to be, he had no other option left open to him. Concluding, he said: "It may be that my judgement is warped and that I am wholly in error in regarding separate electorates for the Depressed Classes as harmful to them or to Hinduism. If so, I am not likely to be in the right with reference to other parts of my philosophy of life. In that case my death by fasting will be at once a penance for my error and a lifting of a weight from off these numberless

men and women who have childlike faith in my wisdom. Whereas if my judgement is right, as I have little doubt it is, the contemplated step is but due to the fulfilment of the scheme of life which I have tried for more than a quarter of a century, apparently not without considerable success."[19]

On September 20, 1932 Gandhi began his fast unto death as a protest against the grant of separate electorates to the untouchables. "The story of this fast," says Ambedkar, reacting to Gandhi's style of registering his protest, "has been told by Mr. Pyarelal in a volume which bears the picturesque and flamboyant title of 'The Epic Fast'. In the pages of this *lours Boswelliana* the curious will find all he wants to know about the happenings in India during these mad days and I need say nothing about it here. Suffice it to say that although Mr. Gandhi went on fast unto death he did not want to die. He very much wanted to live."[20]

The political 'happenings in India during these mad days' included Gandhi's fast unto death which created for Ambedkar a problem and an embarrassment, and that was how to save the Mahatma's life. The only way to put an end to the wrangle and save his life was to alter the Communal Award or withdraw it. As Ambedkar was the true representative of the untouchables, important, *persona grata*, all eyes were turned to him 'as the man or rather as the villain of the piece'. It was widely believed that Gandhi's life was in his hands. Expressing his great, grave dilemma in which he found himself, Ambedkar moans: "It was a baffling situation. I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty which I owed as a part of common humanity to save Gandhi from sure death. There was before me the problem of saving for the Untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. This agreement is known as the Poona Pact."[21] When Prof. N.G. Ranga dismisses Ambedkar's criticisms of Gandhiji's campaign against untouchability and Harijan uplift as 'hot-headed and uncharitable' he gives an evidence of an inherited prejudice which Ambedkar's genuine kindness and solicitude for Gandhi's life were unable to remove. For an ade-

quate realization of the violence of this prejudice witness Prof. Ranga's fiery onslaught in the following:

> His attack upon Gandhiji's insistence upon keeping Harijans (then known as Panchama or Adi-Dravida) within the fold of Hindus, i.e. within the joint electorates, was intemperate, unkind and unjust. His insistence upon his pound of flesh, during Gandhiji's Poona Fast against Ramsay Macdonald's award in favour of separate electorates for Scheduled Castes, hurt the feelings of all nationalists; although it forced the orthodox leaders of Hindus to yield to his demands for protection of Scheduled Castes through reservation of seats within joint electorates. In the end, he won the generous approval of Gandhiji and political admiration of Rajaji, to whom he presented the pen with which he signed the famous Poona Pact. I had quite a painful time in defending his basic stand to my political fellows in Vellore jail. In the end, Gandhiji's life was saved and joint electorates were accepted, all were pleased with that powerful champion of the Harijans.[22]

The persistent Congress attacks on and the unbecoming revulsion of Gandhi's followers towards Ambedkar result mainly from ignorance and prejudice. It is not often realized that Ambedkar's actions were mostly dictated by the social condition of the untouchables then obtaining in the country and by the new national renaissance of the dalits which was slowly struggling into life.

As an equalitarian humanist he had realized early in his life that every individual, high-born or low-caste, had every right to live happily and abundantly and that caste was a brain-woven conceit of the brāhmaṇs, of their scary scriptures. It is high time for us, he urged, to cast aside the intellectual vagaries of the past, of the Vedas and *Manusmriti*, to think and act as mature men and women ready to cope with reality as it is, in its varying aspects of starkness and splendour. And in working through to a sound view of life and destiny, we can take no more important step than to discard the illusion of caste. This renunciation of the brāhmaṇic past will go far in liberating us from false pretensions and vain commitments of *varṇa* organisation. Taking this path onto the plateau of truth, we shall then be making that rare

advance in wisdom which consists in abandoning our illusions the better to attain our egalitarian ideals. For to know clearly and finally that all men are equal and that all caste divisions are illusory enables men to focus their minds completely upon the consummation of human happiness for one and all in the warmth and light of our own humanitarian culture. Ambedkar's counsel therefore is to recognize the true worth of every individual, touchable or untouchable, and to uplift those who are sunk below the level of the most degraded people. The time has come when only the possession of wide, humanitarian interests and deep loyalties beyond the immediate circle of caste men, friends and family can do much to cure the hurt done by the śāstras, especially by Manu. We must involve ourselves in annihilating all form of social injustice and 'the status quo suppression of *panchamas*' and give ourselves to the liberation of the segregated masses, which is possible only if we are able to rise above the narrow intensities of class and caste. The death of brāhmaṇism, Ambedkar prophesied, will enrich the ongoing life of the nation or of humanity as a whole. The affirmative philosophy of a casteless and classless Indian society accepts the inspiration of those reformers and arhats who have passed on and proceeded to carry forward the immense tasks of social emancipation and reconstruction. It casts aside the misleading *varṇa* system of the past and proclaims the virtues of an ethics frankly dedicated to this-earthly human happiness for one and all. Such a sane and humane ethics can be more effective, as well as more high-minded, than any based on the promise of personal liberation.

One must skim through Ambedkar's 'Gandhi and His Fast' to realize what he felt about the untouchables apropos of communal electorates and the caste Hindus. From this material may be gathered some idea of Ambedkar's disillusionment with Gandhi and the Congress; the need for a movement of the untouchables if they were to remain conscious of their wrongs and if the spirit of revolt was to be kept alive among them, the tyrannies to which the caste Hindus were then subjecting them, the indifference of the Congress to their lot that prevailed, and the need for the untouchables to retain their right to freedom of speech and freedom of action on the floor of the legislature if they are to ventilate their grievances and obtain redress of their wrongs by political

action. Ambedkar stressed the need for a movement of the untouchables because, he said, the caste Hindus had to be told that what was 'tragedy of the untouchables' was their crime. He regarded the Congress as 'a full-blooded and blue-blooded Hindu body' in view of its caste-Hindu character. "A movement of the untouchables," he proclaimed, "must mean an open war upon the Caste Hindus. A movement of the Untouchables within the Congress is quite impossible. It must mean an *inter necine* (sic) within the party. The Congress for its own safety cannot allow it."[23]

The most obvious justification for breaking away from the Congress, according to Ambedkar, lies in the fact that the Congress had forbidden the untouchables who were members of the party to carry on any independent movement. As a discerning and dedicated champion of the mute masses, Ambedkar declared with force that the untouchables should no longer remain under the control of the Congress. Recounting the sad tale of woes of the untouchables, he added, "The result is that though the tale of woes of the Untouchables is ever-increasing, the untouchable members of the Legislature are unable even to ask a question about them. So pitiable has their condition become that the Congress Party sometimes requires them to vote against a measure that may in the opinion of the Untouchable members of the Legislature be beneficial to the Untouchables. A recent instance of this occurred in Madras. Rao Bahadur Raja, a member of the Madras Legislature, brought in a Bill to secure the entry of the Untouchables into Hindu Temples in the Madras Presidency. The Congress Government had promised to support it at first. Subsequently the Congress Government in Madras changed its opinion and opposed the measure. It was a dilemma for the Untouchable members of the Madras Legislature. But they had no choice. The whip was applied and they in a body voted against the measure. The representatives of the Untouchables were supposed to be the watch-dogs of the Untouchables. But by reason of having joined the Congress they are muzzled dogs. Far from biting they are not even able to bark. This loss of freedom of speech and action by these Untouchable members is entirely due to their having joined the Congress and subjected themselves to the discipline of the Congress."[24] An *enfant terrible* and a scholar-revolutionary,

Ambedkar called for a revolution and desired a change of attitude towards the untouchables. He reminded that the untouchables had by joining the Congress become muzzled dogs unable even to bark and that they were in a truly wretched condition, or in any case, in an unjust and illogical situation that made them patiently resign to their sufferings that had long characterized their ancestors. As an avid scholar of social history he knew that truly wretched people rarely bring about revolutions. In order to revolt against one's lot, one must be aware of his wretched condition, which presupposes a certain intellectual and cultural level; one must have a clear conception of certain changes and reforms that one would like to adopt; in short, one must be convinced (and it was on this point that Ambedkar's 'Gandhi and His Fast' produced its effect) that things are not going well, that they might be better and that they will be better if the measures proposed by the social revolutionaries are put into practice.

Not unreasonably carried away by his reformist zeal, Ambedkar therefore called for 'revolt and rebellion against the established order'. When one considers the untouchables in their role of rebels, he said, "one feels like congratulating them on their realization that neither spiritual forces nor historical forces are going to bring the millennium."[25] He was gratified to find that realization had at last dawned upon the untouchables that if the Hindu social order was to loosen its stranglehold, it could happen only under two conditions. First, it must be subjected to constant fire and secondly, the untouchables must be independent of the Hindus both in thought and in action. That, he explained, was the reason why the untouchables were insistent upon separate electorates and separate settlements.

Sounding a warning to the untouchables,[26] Ambedkar cautioned them that they must not be deceived by false propaganda and false hopes that they would be emancipated by the Hindus themselves, that 'the general spread of education will make the Hindus act in a rational manner'. He dismissed the idea that the constant preaching of the reformers against untouchability was sure to effect a moral transformation of the Hindus and the quickening of their conscience. "No Untouchable believes in this facile proposition," he declared and continued in a quite caustic, in fact too caustic, tone. "If there are any who do, they are

hypocrites who are prepared to agree to whatever the Hindus have to say in order that by their grace they may be put in places reserved for the Untouchables. They are a predatory band of Untouchables who are out to feather their nests by any means open to them."[27] Such expressions as 'they are hypocrites' and 'they are a predatory band of Untouchables' are expressive of a whiplash tone, of a person who has grown acid about whatever the Hindus say or do. Ambedkar resented those of his own men who were deceived by false propaganda and false hopes. A social idealist himself, he knew that there were two principal agencies which the social idealists relied upon for producing social justice: reason and religion. The rationalists believed that once superstition was eliminated, it would result in the abolition of injustice. Most of our educationists, philosophers, psychologists and social scientists today believe that with universal education and development of printing press an ideal society would be established, a society in which every individual would be enlightened and there would therefore be no place for social injustice.

Ambedkar looked at history, Indian and European, through his erudite mind and noticed that this dogma found no unqualified support in it. It was apparent to his bitter eyes that though in Europe, the old traditions and superstitions which were considered the very root of injustice, had been destroyed, yet social injustice was rampant there and had been growing ever and anon. Fuelled by hatred, he realized that the brāhmaṇ community, in spite of its education, was unprepared to give up its belief in untouchability. It is here that Ambedkar pelts us with a number of questions: "How many Brahmins are free from their belief in untouchability? How many have come forward to undertake a crusade against untouchability? How many are prepared to stand by the side of the Untouchables in their fight against injustice? In short, how many are prepared to make the cause of the Untouchables their own cause?"[28]

As a matter of fact these are not questions but passionate statements made by one who was looking at the whole brāhmaṇ community with scathing dislike. His answer therefore is a summary, collective answer: "The number will be appalingly small." Then he questions with each word bitten out clearly:

"Why does reason fail to bring about social justice?" Ambedkar's query demanded from him the following answer:

> The answer is that reason works so long as it does not come into conflict with one's vested interest. Where it comes into conflict with vested interests, it fails. Many Hindus have a vested interest in untouchability. That, vested interest may take the shape of feeling of social superiority or it may take the shape of economic exploitation such as forced labour or cheap labour, the fact remains that Hindus have a vested interest in untouchability. It is only natural that that vested interest should not yield to the dictates of reason. The Untouchables should therefore know that there are limits to what reason can do.[29]

If there were limits to reason, there were also, says Ambedkar with profound confidence, limits to religion. Religion is helpful in producing justice *within* a community but not *between* communities. From his vast repertoire of historical information, he culls an example or two of religion's failure and with unmistakable clarity refers to the United States where religion has failed to produce justice between the Negroes and the Whites,* and then to Europe where it has failed to produce jusice between Germans and French and between them and the other nations.

Ambedkar was sure the call of nation and that of community were more potent than the call of religion for justice. The untouchables were urged not to be enticed by Hindu religion into believing that it would perform for them the mission of bringing about social justice. Such a task, in Ambedkar's view, could be, might be performed by Islam, Christianity or Buddhism. Hinduism was itself the embodiment of inequity and injustice to the untouchables. For Hindu religion, according to Ambedkar, to preach the gospel of justice is to go against its own being. "To hope for this is to hope for a miracle. Secondly, assuming that this was a task which Hinduism was fitted to perform, it would be impossible for it to perform. The social barrier between them and the Hindus is much greater than the barrier between the Hindus and their men. Religion, however efficacious it may be

*See Appendix III.

within a community or a nation, is quite powerless to break these barriers and (make) them one whole.

"Apart from these agencies of reason and religion the Untouchables are asked to trust the enlightened self-interests of the Hindu privileged classes and the fraternity of the Hindu proletarian.

"As to the privileged classes it be wrong (sic) to depend upon for anything more than their agreeing to be benevolent despots. They have their own class interests and they cannot be expected to sacrifice them for general interests or universal values. On the other hand, their constant endeavour is to identify their class interests with general interests and to assume that their privileges are the just payments with which society rewards specially useful and meritorious functions. They are a poor company to the Untouchables as the Untouchables have found in their conflict with the Hindus.

"For Untouchables to expect to gain help from the Hindu proletariat is also a vain hope. The appeal of the Indian Communists to the Untouchables for solidarity with the Hindu proletariat is no doubt based on the assumption that the proletarian does not desire advantages for himself which he is not willing to share with others. Is this true? Even in Europe the proletarian are not a uniform class. It is marked by class composition, the higher and the lower. This is reflected in their attitudes towards social change, the higher are reformist and the lower are revolutionary. The assumption therefore is not true. So far as India is concerned it is positively false. There is very little for a common front. Socially, there is bound to be antagonism between them. Economically, there cannot be much room for alliance."[30]

Notes

1. Vide Irving Howe, *Literary Modernism* (New York, 1967), pp. 174-75.
2. *Ibid.*
3. E.g. the Special Marriage Amendment Act of 1923.
4. G.S Ghurye, *op. cit.*, p. 275. I am indebted to G.S. Ghurye for the information about 'Caste During the British Rule' contained in this chapter.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
7. Quoted by Eleanor Zelliot in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
11. *W. S.*, Vol. 1, p. 256.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-62.
14. *Ibid.*
15. K. N. Kadam, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Significance of his Movement* (Bombay, 1991), p. 87.
16. Rajni Kothari (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.
17. *Janata*, Bombay, January 9, 1932. Quoted in Rajni Kothari (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.
18. *W.S.* Vol. 5, p. 333.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 340-41.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
22. 'Dr. B.R. Ambedkar A Scholar, Revolutionary and Statesman' in K.L. Chanchreek and Saroj Prasad (ed.), *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* (Delhi, 1991), pp. vi-vii.
23. *W.S.*, Vol. 5, p. 344.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 344-45.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
26. *Vide* Chap. 26, pp. 396ff.
27. *W.S.*, Vol. 5, p. 396.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 398-99.

4

A Manifesto of Ambedkarism

We hate caste gradations and also the gradation of social and religious rights. We, therefore, reject the belief, so characteristic of Hinduism, that the higher the grade of a caste the greater the number of these rights—*astadhikaras* and *sanskaras*—and the lower the grade the lesser their number.

We want to sing the love of equality, the habit of questioning the infallibility of the Vedas and Smritis and of drawing a distinction between principles and rules. Rules are practical whereas principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things.

We want the Hindus to consider whether they should conserve the whole of their social heritage or select what is helpful and transmit to future generations only that much. We are sure their society has got encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse.

We want to sing the reformer in whose armoury reason and morality are the two most powerful weapons.

We do not believe in the glorification of our heroes. But we do believe that never has hero-worship become so blind as we see it in India today. We hate to notice how for the first time in our country money is taking the field as an organised power. We, therefore, want to know who shall rule—wealth or man? Which shall lead—money or intellect? Another question we ask is who shall fill public stations, educated and patriotic free men or the feudal serfs of corporate capital? All Ambedkarians, like Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar himself, know deep in their hearts that for the present, Indian politics, at any rate the Hindu part of it, instead of being spiritualized has become grossly commercialized,

so much so that it has become a byword for corruption. As Babasaheb said, many men of culture are refusing to concern themselves in this cesspool. He reminded us that politics today has become a kind of sewage system intolerably unsavoury and insanitary. To become a politician is like going to work in the drain.

Burn as Babasaheb did with incendiary, patriotic zeal, he inveighed against both Gandhi and Jinnah, an indictment which is acceptable to the present-day Ambedkarians for its unquestionable underlying truth and outspokenness. Says Babasaheb: "Politics in the hands of these two great men have become a competition in extravaganza. If Mr. Gandhi is known as Mahatma, Mr. Jinnah must be known as Qaid-i-Azim. If Gandhi has the Congress, Mr. Jinnah must have the Muslim League. If the Congress has a Working Committee and the All-India Congress Committee, the Muslim League must have its Working Committee and its Council. The session of the Congress must be followed by a session of the League. If the Congress issues a statement the League must also follow suit. If the Congress passes a Resolution of 17,000 words, the Muslim League's Resolution must exceed it by at least a thousand words. If the Congress President has a Press Conference, the Muslim League President must have his. If the Congress must address an appeal to the United Nations, the Muslim League must not allow itself to be outbidden. When is all this to end? When is there to be a settlement? There are no near prospects. They will not meet, except on preposterous conditions. Jinnah insists that Gandhi should admit that he is a Hindu. Gandhi insists that Jinnah should admit that hs is one of the leaders of the Muslims. Never has there been such a deplorable state of bankruptcy of statesmanship as one sees in these two leaders of India."[1]

We subscribe to all this, though we also admit that Gandhi and Jinnah did much that is laudable for their nations. But to us Ranade was a truly great man, not only big in his physique and in his sincerity, he was also big in intellect. He had intellect of a high calibre. We, following Babasaheb, regard him not merely as a lawyer and judge of the High Court but also as a first-class economist, a first-class historian, a first-class educationist and a

first-class divine. Neither to Babasaheb nor to us was he a politician. It is good, we say, that he was not. For were he a politician, he might not have been a great man. What is interesting to us is that Ranade was a profound student of politics, not a politician, though. His whole life was but a relentless campaign for social reform. It is on his role as a social reformer, courageous and endowed with the vision of the reformer, that this title to being a great man rests. He was an embodiment of hope and optimism, for he held out the confidence, the need of the hour, that the fallen shall rise. He realized that the downfall was due to certain weakness in the Hindu social system itself. He exhorted his contemporaries to remove these weaknesses, to reform Hindu society, and to revitalize it. Ranade himself developed a passion for social reform, to bring about which he took recourse to meetings, missions, lectures, sermons, writing articles and letters, interviews, all carried on with an unrelenting zeal.

It was unfortunate that the very people whom he wanted to reform were averse to change—were deeply rooted in their past and inalienably tethered to the belief that their ancestors were the wisest and noblest of men and that the social system which they had devised was the most ideal system. What to Ranade were the shames and sins of the Hindu society were to these people the most sacred and inviolable injunctions of their religion. The common man would not therefore even dream of violating or transgressing those injunctions. The intelligentsia on the other hand was ripped up, forming two disparate schools—a school which was orthodox but unpolitical and another which was modern but primarily political. The former, led by Chiplunkar and the latter by Tilak combined against Ranade, creating for him as many difficulties as they could. We agree with Babasaheb that both did the greatest harm not only to the cause of social reform but also to that of political reform in India. It is a mystifying puzzle to us, as it was to Babasaheb, that the orthodox, unpolitical school believed in realizing the ideal and idealizing the real. This Hegelian view, we hold, was egregiously wrong.

We want to declare, as did Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, that the religious and social system of the Hindus is such that its ideal form cannot be given a reality, for the ideal is bad. Nor can the

real be elevated to the status of the ideal, for the real—the existing state of affairs—is bad enough. It is, in fact, worse than what worse can be. We are not exaggerating.

Having examined the Hindu social and religious system from the point of social utility and social justice, we have come to the inevitable conclusion that "Hindu religion has been a bad coin to start with. The Hindu ideal of society as prescribed by Hindu religion has acted as a most demoralizing and degrading influence on Hindu society. It is Nietzschean in its form and essence. Long before Nietzsche was born Manu had proclaimed the gospel which Nietzsche sought to preach. It is a religion which is not intended to establish liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a gospel which proclaims the worship of the superman—the Brahmin by the rest of the Hindu society. It propounds that the superman and his class alone are born to live and to rule. Others are born to serve them, and to nothing more. They have no life of their own to live, and no right to develop their own personality. This has been the gospel of the Hindu Religion. Hindu philosophy, whether it is Vedanta, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, has moved in its own circle without in any way affecting the Hindu religion. It has never had the courage to challenge this gospel. That Hindu philosophy that everything is Brahma remained only a matter of intellect. It never became a social philosophy. The Hindu philosophers had both their philosophy and their Manu held apart in two hands, the right not knowing what the left had. The Hindu is never troubled by their inconsistency. As to their social system, can things be worst? The caste system is in itself a degenerate form of the Chaturvarnya which is the ideal of the Hindu. How can anybody who is not a congenital idiot accept Chaturvarnya as the ideal form of society? Individually and socially it is a folly and a crime. One class and one class alone to be entitled to education and learning! One class and one class alone to be entitled to arms! One class and one class alone to trade! One class and one class alone to serve!"[2] That is why we hate the whole Hindu social structure which has encroached on all of us, pressing us, harrowing us, forcing the unprivileged into a corner to escape from which these unfortunate social dregs would have to fight their way out.

The Hindus pride themselves on their social caste structure which we want to destroy and demolish. We want to demolish the Chaturvarnya, the Hindu caste hierarchies which have made the Indian society vulnerable. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had realized long ago that the question "Can the Hindu caste system stand the gale and the wind of an aggression?" would draw a negative answer. In his estimate of Ranade he had stated the blunt and uncompromising truth that a society must be cohesive enough to mobilize its forces both for defence and for offence. "With functions and duties exclusively distributed and immutably assigned, what way is there for mobilization?" queried Babasaheb and answered it by maintaining that ninety per cent of the Hindus could not bear arms under the Hindu social system. No country can defend itself if its armed forces cannot be augmented and new soldiers recruited in the hour of invasion. We hold—and our witness is history—that it is not the Buddha who, as is often alleged, weakened the Hindu society by his gospel of non-violence. What Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar said in this connection is noteworthy. He blamed the brāhmaṇic theory of Chaturvarnya not only for the defeat but for the decay of Hindu society.

It would be sheer lunacy to take offence at these remarks about the demoralizing effect of the Hindu socio-religious ideal on Hindu society, for the truth is on our side. Only those ignorant of history can deny the charge. May we simply ask in Babasaheb's words: "Is there any society in the world which has unapproachables, unshadowables and unseeables? Is there any society in which there exists today primitive people, who live in jungles, who do not know even to clothe themselves? How many do they count in numbers? Is it a matter of hundreds, is it a matter of thousands? I wish they numbered a paltry few. The tragedy is that they have to be counted in millions, millions of Untouchables, millions of Criminal Tribes, millions of Primitive Tribes!! One wonders whether the Hindu civilization is civilization or infamy?"[3]

In 'A Manifesto of Italian Futurism', on which we have modelled this manifesto, it has been remarked: "To admire an old painting is to pour our sensitiveness into a funeral urn, instead of throwing it forward by violent casts of creation and action. Do you mean thus to waste the best of you in a useless

admiration of the past that must necessarily leave you exhausted, lessened, trampled?"[4]

We the living Ambedkarians are also a kind of Futurists who abhor to admire the old Hindu social system, for to admire it would tantamount to pouring our sensitiveness into a funeral urn. Like the initiating proponents of Futurism we, too, would not like to waste the best of us in such a worthless admiration of what was, and what has been, so inglorious, ignoble and horrifying as the Chaturvarnya and the Hindu caste system—as the Hindu law books and the ancient śāstric, brāhmaṇic injunctions.

Since the future is not forbidden us, we need to have no salve for our wounds in the past. We want nothing of Hinduism—we are Ambedkarians—the militants, the rebellious dalits described as untouchables by the scheming, manoeuvring caste Hindus. Infinitesimal as we are as intellectuals, we are now wide awake and are fully conversant with the risque innuendoes and the *double entendre* of the brāhmaṇic writings on us, the cut and thrust of politics, the intrigues and excitements of diplomacy, the society which still looks at us with raised eye-brows.

We have no prejudices as such against brāhmaṇism; what we are opposed to is its concept of Chaturvarnya, its theory of caste gradation. Witness, for example, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's defence of Brahmaism where he concludes his remarks on the twenty-second riddle in Hinduism.[5] There are, he points out, two well-known charges against Brahmaism. The first is that Brahmaism is but a piece of impudence, a kind of arrogance, for how can one say, "I am Brahma". The other charge often levelled against Brahmaism is the fallibility and imperfection of man and his consequent inability to know Brahma. We as objective analysts of Hinduism and of everything it stands for feel that "I am Brahma" may have a ring of impudence about it, but as Babasaheb remarked, "it can also be an assertion of one's own worth. In a world where humanity suffers so much from an inferiority complex such an assertion on the part of man is to be welcomed. Democracy demands that each individual shall have every opportunity for realizing his worth. It also requires that each individual shall know that he is as good as everybody else. Those who sneer at *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahma) as an impudent utterance forget the other part of the *Maha Vakya* namely *Tatvamasi* (Thou

art also Brahma). If *Aham Brahmasmi* has stood alone without the conjunct of *Tatvamasi* it may not have been possible to sneer at it. But with the conjunct of *Tatvanmasi* (sic) the charge of selfish arrogance cannot stand against Brahmaism."[6]

When probing such an argument one must not forget Ambedkar's general lingering hostility to Hinduism. Here the remarks on Brahmaism, unchallengeably favourable, make the argument piquant and support the belief that Ambedkar was not unduly harsh, cold or contemptuous in his attitude to Hinduism. The defence of Brahmaism is both interesting and convincing and reveals, indirectly though, that brāhmaṇic literature was not all devoid of 'social implications which have a tremendous value as a foundation for democracy'. It is this revelation that adds to the piquancy of Babasaheb's argument which for the most part has been critical of Hindu mores and beliefs. The brāhmaṇic belief that 'I am Brahma' is defended on a simple political ground and for its 'certain social implications'. "If all persons," Ambedkar argues, "are parts of Brahma then all are equal and all must enjoy the same liberty which is what Democracy means. Looked at from this point of view Brahma may be unknowable. But there cannot be slightest doubt that no doctrine could furnish a stronger foundation for Democracy than the doctrine of Brahma.

"To support Democracy because we are all children of God is a very weak foundation for Democracy to rest on. That is why Democracy is so shaky wherever it [is] made to rest on such a foundation. But to recognize and realize that you and I are parts of the same cosmic principle leaves room for no other theory of associated life except democracy. It does not merely preach Democracy. It makes democracy an obligation of one and all.

"Western students of Democracy have spread the belief that Democracy has stemmed either from Christianity or from Plato and that there is no other source of inspiration for democracy. If they had known that India too had developed the doctrine of Brahmaism which furnishes a better foundation for Democracy they would not have been so dogmatic. India too must be admitted to have a contribution towards a theoretical foundation for Democracy."[7]

All this is logical and therefore irrefutable. But this is the sunnier side of Ambedkar's argument, not in keeping with the

general drift of his attitude. In the same vein and maintaining his same meaningful poise, he then goes on to puncture the pride of the brāhmaṇs and resumes his characteristic critical mood by asking: "The question is what happened to this doctrine of Brahmaism?...Why then Brahmaism failed to produce a new society?... But they did not ask how they could support inequality between the Brahmin and the Shudra, between man and waman, between casteman and outcaste?... Can there be a greater dilemma then this?" Having posed these questions, which may be deemed statements, Ambedkar strikes out at the brāhmaṇs with Shankaracharya as his main target: "What is more ridiculous is the teaching of the Great Shankaracharya. For it was this Shankaracharya who taught that there is Brahma and this Brahma is real and that it pervades all and at the same time upheld all the inequities of the Brahmanic society. Only a lunatic could be happy with being the propounder of two such contradictions. Truly as the Brahmin is like a cow, he can eat anything and everything as the cow does and remain a Brahmin."[8]

The Ambedkarian culture rests on democratic norms and a mandatory suspension of brāhmaṇic values rooted in the ancient śāstras which again are rooted in inequality. Manu, the brāhmaṇic law-giver and Ambedkar, the Manu of modern India, especially of the dregs and dalits, stand at opposite poles of the social spectrum; the brāhmaṇ was and never shall be, but the newer one is and ever shall be. Let the dead Past bury its dead. Ambedker for us is the Lamp which shall stand in the great history of the land, a noble type of good, heroic manhood.

This culture derives from Ambedkar's ardent patriotism with which every piece of his writing is indelibly stamped. Even his earliest essay on *Administration and Finance of the East India Company* submitted on 15 May 1915 to Columbia University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts is not without its muffled note of patriotism which often surfaces in such lines as the following:

> It is lamentable that the Act made no provision for enlisting the voice of the natives in the administration of their own country. In this vital respect, can anyone say that the adminis-

> tration of the Company differed very much from the administration of the Crown?
> ... if India's tribute cannot be weighed in the scales of justice and humanity then England's contribution cannot be weighed in the scale of gold and silver. The last statemant is both literally as well as figuratively true. England has added nothing to the stock of gold and silver in India: on the contrary, she has depleted India—"the sink of the world".
> But whether mere animal peace is to be preferred to economic destitution, let everyone decide for himself.[9]

What Edwin R.A. Seligman of Columbia University, New York, says in his Foreword to *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India*: *A Study in the Provincial Decentralization of Imperial Finance* is no exaggeration. He pays glowing tributes to Ambedkar's dissertation, describing it as excellent and the problem discussed in it as 'one that is arousing a growing interest in all parts of the world'. In his veiw "The value of Mr. Ambedkar's contribution to this discussion lies in the objective recitation of the facts and the impartial analysis of the interesting development that has taken place in his native country. The lessons are applicable to other countries as well; nowhere, to my knowledge, has such a detailed study of the underlying principles been made."[10]

In Chapter X of the fourth part of this study of Indian Finance Ambedkar throws light on what he calls 'the necessity for a change' and indicts the unresponsive British Government and its Executive in India for not doing 'certain things most conducive to progress'. He traces the reason to its character, motives and interests and with his usual historical sense and discerning eye remarks that this Government and its executive in India could not sympathize with the living forces operating in the Indian society. If it "was not charged with its wants, its pains, its cravings and its desires, was inimical to its aspirations, did not advance Education, disfavoured Swadeshi or snapped at anything that smacked of nationalism, it was because all these things went against its grain."[11] It is in the same context that we find some of the most memorable lines written by Babasaheb at that

early stage of his academic career. To buttress his argument that the British did not govern India in the interest of its people, he observes with remarkable pithiness: "If the Sultan does not abolish Mahomedanism, Pope ban Catholicism, the Brāhmiṇ condemn caste, or the British Parliament declare the preservation of blue-eyed babies illegal, it is not because they *cannot* do things, but it is because they *will* not do these things."[12]

Enlarging on the same idea, he further observes with more historical contexts and vereities added to it: "Caesar dare not subvert the worship of the Roman people, a modern parliament dare not tax the colonies, however much they would. For the same reason the Government of India dared not abolish the caste system, prescribe monogamy, alter the laws of succession, legalize inter-marriage or venture to tax the tea planters."[13] As if arguing deductively, Ambedkar then draws the following conclusion: "Progress involves interference with the existing code of social life and interference is likely to cause resistance. Nonetheless a government which is of the people and is not detached from them can vanture on the path of progress, because it is in a position to know where obedience will end and resistance will begin. But the Indian Executive not being of the people could not feel the pulse of the people."[14] The voice of simmering, seething patriotism, of one who is to battle for his ingrained egalitarian values, to defend his democratic rights and equalitarian commitments can easily be heard in these sentences. Ours is therefore the kind of flaming iridescent patriotism which burns and consumes a true nationalist—all for the people, for democracy, for the vindication of dalit rights and for their liberty and equality.

One of the principles to which Ambedkar adhered throughout his life is stated at the end of his dissertation on 'The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India'. A sound system of finance, he argues, is not possible where the executives are hybrid, responsibility is divided, functions are divided and powers are reserved. Where such conditions prevail, one cannot expect a good system of Government. The primary solution, he suggests, is to be sought in the formation of undivided government based on a collective responsibility. Such an achievement is possible only when the government derives its mandate from a common

source. Before reaching the expected conclusion that in India the political problem is entirely a social problem, Ambedkar winds his way through a maze of arguments:

> That such a consummation should take place as early as possible is devoutly to be wished. In that behalf it is encouraging to know that dyarchy is but a transitional system. The only question is how long and protracted will the period of transition be. The justification for introducing a dyarchical form of government rests on the supposition that India is at present ill-prepared to sustain a system of responsible government in anything like completeness, for owing to the lack of education and political experience, the Indian electorate will for some time be unable either to formulate their requirements intelligently or effectively impose a mandate upon their representatives, and that owing to the inveterate social prejudices of the educated classes there is a great danger of their abusing the political power to exploit the masses. This cardinal fact, it was held, must differentiate the degree and the kind of responsibility which can be introduced at the outset from that which will be the eventual resultant of the new system, and must impose the obligation of ensuring that the forces which now hold the people together are not completely withdrawn before satisfactory substitutes are ready to take their place.[15]

Aware that there are others to think that there is no necessity to wait till the cardinal fact disappears, Ambedkar cites the familiar line of argument which is usually advanced in India by the political radicals and social tories. "If," he concedes, "we put aside the painful story of the harsh, cruel and inhuman treatment which the classes in India have accorded to the masses, truth is on their side, for in every country there have been downtrodden communities suffering from social oppression and social injustice, and yet no country has had to be without political power on that account. But those who use this argument forget that if other countries like America with her Negroes and Japan with her Hitas are in possession of political power without having first destroyed social inequality, it is due to the fact of their having

been in possession of military power."[16] Political freedom, in Ambedkar's view, is ensured by military force and moral force, both of which are the chief means to it. And then with fine judgement he sums up his view that a country which cannot generate military force must cultivate the moral one. For him the political problem in India is therefore entirely a social problem, a postponement of which 'virtually postpones the day when India can have a free government subject to the mandate of none but her own people'.

We believe with W.S. Thatcher, the reviewer of the book[17] that the author, B.R. Ambedkar, is to be congratulated upon the impartial way in which he had discussed an eminently controversial subject.

A feature that distinguishes Babasaheb from other Indian political writers and economists is the impartiality with which his appraisals and reappraisals are communicated. Our rejection of the cult of hero worship derives from him. He challenged the phoniest and the saintliest all alike and smashed the idols to smithereens—even such idols of the economist as Prof. Keynes, Mr. Shirras, and the Chamberlain Commission. He has the interest of the Indian people uppermost in his mind. *The Problem of the Rupee*: *Its Origin and Its Solution* is not without its proper patriotic and impartial note. There is a hint of the nationalist, a friend of the Indian masses, in every proposal, agreement or refutation. Meandering through many a labyrinth of prosaic arguments befitting the financial expert that he was, Babasaheb proposes to show that to many the best way to stabilize the rupee is to provide for effective convertibility into gold. This, he maintains, is not the best way but only 'one way of doing it'. Proceeding with his usual ifs and buts, with which his arguments expectedly abound, he thinks that "a far better way would be to have an inconvertible rupee with a fixed limit of issue. Indeed, if I had any say in the matter, I would propose that the Government of India should melt the rupees, sell them as bullion and use the proceeds for revenue purposes and fill the void by an inconvertible paper. But that may be too radical a proposal, and I do not therefore press for it, although I regard it as essentially sound. In any case, the vital point is to close the Mints, not merely to the public, as they have been, but to the Government as well. Once that

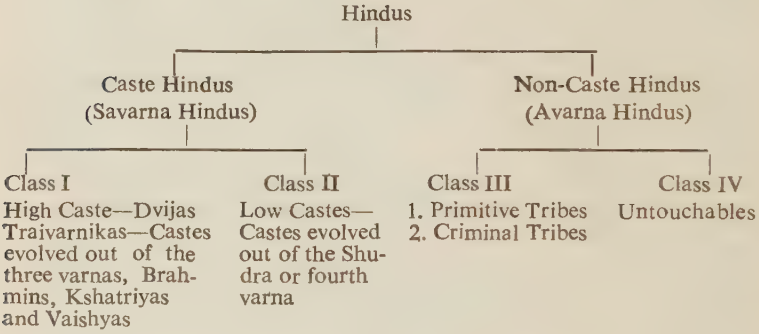
is done, I venture to say that the Indian currency, based on gold as legal tender with a rupee currency fixed in issue, will conform to the principles embodied in the English currency system."[18] The points are argued from the point of view of the welfare of the Indian people. Wherever Babasaheb's arguments run counter to those of eminent authorities such as Prof. Keynes, Shirras and the Chamberlain Commission, he says so with ruthless forthrightness. A glaring example of this is the following passage from the chapter 'A Return to the Gold Standard':

> It is the rupee currency which has been, ever since the Mint closure, the chief source of danger to the welfare of the Indian people, particularly because of the principle governing its issue. Because that principle has the support, in itself a surprising thing, of such eminent authorities as Prof. Keynes, Mr. Shirras, and the Chamberlain Commission, it cannot alter the case for depriving the Government of this power of managing the rupee currency, for the principle is essentially unsound.[19]

The reason why the fallacy in the reasoning does not appear on the surface is then stated. It is, says Babasaheb, due to the peculiar nature of money. He goes on to explain why money is wanted and represents in this context the views of those who believe that money is wanted only for the reason that it has a purchasing power. Ambedkar realizes the admissibility of this proposition but states at the same time that "that does not quite explain why people so incessantly want money, even when they know that the value of money is so unstable. Indeed, if purchasing power was the only consideration we should not find such a desire for the current means of purchase. That desire can only be accounted for by the fact that money has a differential advantage over other goods, in that it has in the highest degree what Menger called the quality of saleability. That one can more often buy at a bargain than sell at a bargain is simply another way of stating that everyone desires to hold his resources in the most saleable form of money. In this sense it is absolutely true that no more money can be issued than there is demand for. But from that it does not follow that there can be no over-issue of money purely for the currency needs at any given time."[20]

Our economists are the best persons to rightly estimate Babasaheb's financial and economic disquisitions. Our concern is primarily social and our views those of Babasaheb in general as are expressed in the fifth volume of his *Writings and Speeches*.

We are down-to-earth realists and, treading in the footsteps of Babasaheb, declare with all the force in our voice that were the social order based merely on inequality, it would have been destroyed long, long ago. But the pity is that it is based on graded inequality, as a result of which the śūdra, though anxious to pull down the brāhmaṇ, is not prepared to see the untouchable raised to his level. As Babasaheb said, he prefers to suffer the indignities heaped upon him by the brāhmaṇs, to join the untouchables rather than to try to bring about a general levelling down of the social order. Consequently, there is hardly anybody to join the untouchables in their struggle.[21] They are completely isolated. In order that one may have a clear picture of the Hindu social organization and of the classes of which it is composed, Babasaheb's diagramatic presentation of this organization facilitates one's understanding of it:



From the diagram drawn above it is revealed that though there are countless castes among the Hindus, they can all be grouped under four classes. Of these four, Class I forms the *Herenfolk* or the Ruling Class, Classes III and IV form the subject people. Again and again Ambedkar returns to Manu and mounting venom in his voice, he mentions Manu 'the architect of Hindu society'. It is in this context that he speaks of the laws of the Hindu social order as being repulsive to class II, the śūdras as they are to class

IV, the untouchables. It is interesting, Ambedkar submits, to know the status of the śūdras in the Hindu society as prescribed by Manu. The latter asks the householders of the brāhmaṇs, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas not to dwell in a country where the ruler is a śūdra. For Manu a śūdra is not to be deemed a respectable person. Brāhmaṇs are instructed not to beg from a śūdra any property for performing a sacrifice—for religious purposes. Writing on the problem of isolation of the śūdras, Ambedkar reproduces some of the laws of Manu, according to one of which a śūdra was not to have a connection with a woman of the higher classes; an act of adultery committed by him was an offence involving capital punishment. Arraigning the British rulers with the same palpable tinge of bitterness, he regrets their apathy towards the untouchables and laments that "the British Government never cared about the personnel of the Civil Service. Indeed it opened the gates of the administration to those classes who believed in the old Established Order of the Hindus in which the principle of equality had no place. As a result of this fact, India has been ruled by the British but administered by the Hindus. A few statistics of the composition of the Civil Service will fully demonstrate this fact."[22]

Our opposition to the Established Order also derives from Babasaheb's opposition to all status quoists. Pouring venom on the Hindus with a touch of seething anger, he remarks: "From the capital of India down to the village the whole administration is rigged by the Hindus. The Hindus are like the omnipotent almighty pervading all over the administration in all its branches having its authority in all its nooks and corners. There is no loophole for anyone opposed to the old order to escape. No matter what the Department, whether it is Revenue, Police or Justice it is manned by the Hindu. If the Established Order has continued to exist, it is because of the unfailing support it received from the Hindu officials of the State. The Hindu officials are not merely administering the affairs on their merit. They are administering them with an eye to the parties. Their principle is not equal justice to all. Their motto is justice consistent with the Established Order. This is inevitable. For they carry over into administration the attitude towards different classes in society under the Established Order. This is well illustrated by the atti-

tude of the State officials towards the Untouchables in the field of administration."[23]

In order that we may have a clear understanding of Babasaheb's views on Hinduism and on matters of related interest, we would let him speak in his own lucid and forceful manner. Of hundreds of classical passages on Hinduism the following are the most representative and expressive of his philosophy of Hinduism in its entirety:

1. Justice has always evoked ideas of equality, of proportion of "compensation". Equity signifies equality. Rules and regulations, right and righteousness are concerned with equality in value. If all men are equal, all men are of the same essence and the common essence entitled them to the same fundamental rights and to equal liberty. [III. 25]*
2. The system of rank and gradation is, simply another way of enunciating the principle of inequality so that it may be truly said that Hinduism does not recognize equality. This inequality in status is not merely the inequality that one sees in the warrant of precedence prescribed for a ceremonial gathering at a King's Court. It is a permanent social relationship among the classes to be observed. [*Ibid.*]
3. Regarding economic security three things shine out in Hinduism. In the first place Hinduism denies freedom of a vocation. In the scheme of Manu each man has his avocation preordained for him before he is born. Hinduism allows no choice. The occupation being preordained it has no relation to capacity nor to inclination. [III. 39]
4. In the second place Hinduism compels people to serve ends chosen by others. Manu tells the Shudra that he is born to serve the higher classes. He exhorts him to make that his ideal. [*Ibid.*]
5. The period of defeat and darkness is the period when Chaturvarnya flourished to the damnation of the greater part of the people of the country. [III. 71]
6. If these conclusions are sound, how can a philosophy which dissects society in fragments, which dissociates

*The Roman numerals stand for the volume of Ambedkar's *Writings and Speeches* used and are followed by page number.

work from interest, which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the rights of man to interests vital to life and which prevented society from mobilizing resources for common action in the hour of danger, be said to satisfy the test of Social Utility. [*Ibid.*]

7. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order—the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order—the relation of workman to workman, is consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate. [III. 128]

8. All Brahmins can be recruited to form the army of Brahmanic priesthood. Further no particular training or initiation ceremony is necessary for a Brahmin to act as a priest. His will to officiate is enough to make him function as a priest. In Brahmanism the priesthood can never become extinct. Every Brahmin is a potential priest of Brahmanism and be drafted in service when the need be. There is nothing to stop the rake's life and progress. This is not possible in Buddhism. A person must be ordained in accordance with established rites by priests already ordained, before he can act as a priest. After the massacre of the Buddhist priests, ordination became impossible so that the priesthood almost ceased to exist. [III. 234-35]

9. There is therefore nothing to vitiate the conclusion that the fall of Buddhism was due to the Buddhist becoming covers to Islam as a way of escaping the tyranny of Brahmanism. The evidence, if it does not support the conclusion, at least makes it probable. If it has been a disaster, it is a disaster for which Brahmanism must thank itself. [III. 228]

10. What object Brahmanism could have had in converting Varna into caste it is not difficult to imagine. The object was to make the high status enjoyed by the Brahmins from ancient times the privilege of every Brahmin and his progeny without reference to merits or to qualifications. [III. 289]

11. Manu knew that by making Varna hereditary, the most ignorant Brahmin will be elevated to the status occupied by the most learned Brahmin. He feared that the former may not be respected as much as the most learned, which was the object of this attempt at the ennoblement of the whole class of Brahmins. Manu is very much concerned about the ignorant Brahmin—a new thing—and warns people against being disrespectful to an ignorant and mean Brahmin. [*Ibid.*]

12. What was the position of Shudra before Manu? Manu treats the Shudra as though he was an alien Non-Aryan not entitled to the social and religious privileges of the Aryan. Unfortunately the view that the Shudra was a Non-Aryan is too readily accepted by the generality of the people. But there can be no doubt that this view has not the slightest foundation in the literature of the ancient Aryans. [III. 418]

13. There is safety, if no definite guidance, in the multiplicity of views expressed by different educated classes drawn from different strata of society. In such a multiplicity of views there is no danger of society being misguided or misdirected by the views of one single educated class drawn from one single class of society and which is naturally bound to place the interest of its class before the interests of the country. By the change made by Brahmanism India ceased to have safe and sure guidance of an intellectual class. But what is worse is that the Hindus lost the safety and security which other peoples have and which arises from the multiplicity of views expressed by various educated classes drawn from different strata of society. [III. 325-26]

14. By the denial of education of the Shudras, by diverting the Kshatriyas to military persuits and the Vaishyas to trade and by reserving education to themselves the Brahmins alone could become the educated class—free to misdirect and misguide the whole society. By converting Varna into caste they declared that mere birth was a real and final measure of the worth of a man. Caste and

graded inequality made disunity and discord a matter of course. [III. 326]

15. All this disfigurement of the original *Varṇa* system would have been tolerable if it had remained a mere matter of social practice. But Brahmanism was not content to leave the matter there. It wanted to give the Chaturvarnya in its changed and perverted form the force of law. This new Chaturvarnya the making of Brahmanism occupies in the Manu Smriti as the Law of Persons and the Law of Family. Nobody can make a mistake about it. Manu made it an offence for a person of a lower Caste to arrogate to himself the status of a higher Caste or to pass off as a member of the higher Caste. [*Ibid.*]

16. The history of India is nothing but a history of a mortal conflict between—Buddhism and Brahmanism. So neglected is this truth that no one will be found to give it his ready acceptance. Indeed there may not be wanting persons who would repudiate any such suggestion. [III. 267]

17. Manu places the Brahmin above the ordinary penal law for felony. He is to be allowed to leave the country withdraw a wound on him and with all property in proved offences of capital punishment. He is not to suffer forfeiture of fine nor capital punishment. He suffered only banishment which in the words of Hobbes was only a "Change of air" after having committed the most heinous crimes. [III. 279]

18. The laws of Manu also explain the determined way in which the Brahmins proceeded to use their political power to degrade the Shudras and the women to their old status. The triumphant Brahmanism began its onslaught on both the Shudras and the women in pursuit of the old ideal namely servility and Brahmanism did succeed in making the Shudras and women the servile classes, Shudras the serfs to the three higher classes and women the serfs to their husbands. Of the black deeds committed by Brahmanism after its triumph over Buddhism this one is the blackest. There is no parallel in history for so foul

deeds of degradation committed by a class of usurpers in the interest of class domination. The collosal character of this deed of degradation perpetrated by Brahmanism is unfortunately not fully realized. It is concealed by those small monosyllabic words, Stri and Shudra. Let those who wish to get an idea of the enormity of their deed think of the numbers that lie behind these two terms. What part of the population do they apply to? The woman represents one half of the population. Of the balance the Shudra represents not less than two third. The two together make up about 75 per cent of the total population. It is this huge mass of people that has been doomed by Brahmanism to eternal servility and eternal degradation. [III. 316-17]

19. If he says that "I am a Hindu because I hold to the beliefs of the Hindus" his answer cannot be right for here one is confronted with the fact that Hinduism has no definite creed. The beliefs of persons who are by all admitted to be Hindus often differ more widely from each other than do those of Christians and Muhammadans. Limiting the issue to cardinal beliefs the Hindus differ among themselves as to the beliefs which are of cardinal importance. Some say that all the Hindu scriptures must be accepted, but some would exclude the Tantras, while others would regard only the Vedas as of primary importance; some again think that the sole essential is belief in the doctrine of karma and metempsychosis. [IV. 14]

There is no need to dilate on these provocative, inflammatory and terrorist ideas, interesting though they certainly are. Babasaheb's activities centred round and were prompted by what he thought and felt or by the values and ideals he had imbibed from experience or had them shaped by his spiritual masters.

Notes

1. *W.S.*, Vol. 1, p. 228.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

4. 'A Manifesto of Italian Futurism', Irving Howe (ed.), *Literary Modernism*, p. 171.
5. *Vide W.S.*, Vol. 4, pp. 285 ff.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
7. *Ibid.*,
8. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, pp. 47-48.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 307-08.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 308.
17. *The Evolution of Provincial Finance in British India* by B.R. Ambedkar was published in London by P.S. King & Sons and reviewed by W. S. Thatcher in the Vol. XXXVI of *The Journal of the Royal Economic Society* edited by J. M. Keynes and D. H. Macgregor.
18. *W. S.*, Vol. 6, p. 328.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 613.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 116.
22. *Ibid.*, p, 104.
23. *Ibid.*

5

The Untouchables' Journey to Freedom

Of all the social reformers of this century, Bindeshwar Pathak is certainly best qualified to be deemed an Ambedkarian, since he has already devoted a great deal of his life to the abolition of scavenging in India and to the liberation, so to speak, of scavengers. With his mind crammed full of pragmatic wisdom and transcendent idealism, he has put forth solutions to the problem of the achuts and, to demonstrate their feasibility, both redeemed and rehabilitated more than twenty-five thousand scavengers. The well-known sociologist and academician, Z. Ahmad, wrote that there is something piquantly bizarre about the story of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak's phenomenal rise to eminence and his reputation as one of the world's most outstanding social workers and pioneers. For many of us, he is also an eminent action sociologist, thinker, and avant-garde reformer. Considering the dynamism with which he is gifted, his reputation is bound to grow from year to year and encompass the whole world. He is a confirmed realist, of the earth earthy, and endowed with the wisdom of the ancient seers and the acumen of the present-day scientist-Ambedkarian. He proves beyond any doubt that ideas without facts are blind and facts without ideas are empty. There is, I am sure, a close connection between Dr. Pathak the sociologist and Dr. Pathak the zealous reformer and revolutionary, and both appear to be a natural development of the kind of life he leads.

The numerous articles in Indian and foreign periodicals, the discussion of the questions Dr. Pathak's attainments have forged, and the publication of his books, especially of *Road to Freedom*,[1]

on the liberation of scavengers and the Sulabh Shauchalaya System (now Sulabh International) have often caused his contemporaries to marvel at his gifts and to be jealous of his phenomenal success. To some, he is but a derivation from Mahatma Gandhi and his work but a continuation of Gandhi's. Although a smasher of counterfeit, phoney norms and a burning inspiration to his countrymen like Gandhi, Dr. Pathak has little of Gandhi in him, nor is his work an extension of Bapu's programmes. In fact, Dr. Pathak's work, though obviously reminiscent of Gandhi, is essentially Ambedkarian.

Road to Freedom rejects both the centuries-old prejudice against the achuts and the notion, common both in rural and urban areas, that scavenging makes the scavenger untouchable. The traditional fallacies darkening the minds of touchables do not worry this initiator of the Sulabh Movement, nor does he bother his head with the criticism of his deriders, the orthodox brāhmaṇs, to whose caste he belongs. Without disrupting the habitual notions connected with the Hindu caste system he translates his value-system and ideal into action—he is an action sociologist par excellence—and in this he differs from the avowed Ambedkarians who believe in smashing all caste hierarchies with vengeance. In this Dr. Pathak reveals an amphibious, unified sensibility, a Janus-like double facedness. He does not repudiate all the śāstras, the brāhmaṇic rites and rituals, nor does he lend support to any casteist cult either. He is progressive, a virtuoso with a scientific outlook and an admirer, not a blind follower, of Hindu culture. I never heard him uttering invectives or pouring out venom at the mention of the Vedas and the Puranas. He can, I am sure, live in divided and distinguished worlds at the same time and allow contraries to fuse in his temperament, which is the reason why, in spite of his progressive, humanistic and egalitarian outlook, he also nurtures his ancestral beliefs and totems. This seeming contradiction of heresy and orthodoxy in his temperament is typical of Dr. Pathak's sometimes paradoxical positions.

Those who have followed his career, will confirm that he has been tireless in the task of liberating the scavengers through low-cost sanitation. He stands out therefore among the Gandhians and merges with the Ambedkarians both because of his belief in the primacy of social reform and on account of his deeper,

practical understanding of the problems of the downtrodden. Not content with giving them a mere name—harijan—he has always striven to lead them to freedom, to smash up those fetters, social, religious and political, that enchained and enslaved them. Furthermore, his analysis of sanitary problems shows that the young Bindeshwar has also understood the requirements of the Indian masses in general and of the people of Bihar in particular more deeply than the dreamers and idealists, the so-called reformers.

Commenting on the burning problem of sanitation and the need for a low-cost system, he says that "the traditional system of service latrines in urban communities (as well as rural communities) of India has been a source of insanitation and pollution of surroundings in different ways and for different reasons." On the basis of the survey study conducted by Kalbermatten (1980: 6) in different under-developed and developing areas, the investigator came to the conclusion that "service-latrine system is responsible for the breeding of insects and infectious germs not only at the places of disposal, but also on the route through which the human waste is carried by the scavengers either in buckets or in trolleys. Moreover, the system is also responsible for the persistence of insanitary conditions in the surrounding areas. This system is definitely injurious to human health and stands against the programme of improving the surroundings." This gives some indication of the problem which Bindeshwar has always blithely tackled as also of his first-hand knowledge of the conditions—social, economic and hygienic prevailing around him. His more commonsensical aims and the values that underlie them, especially his belief that scavengers should not only be liberated but also rehabilitated and that sociology must be action-oriented and not just theoretical, dwelling in the wonderland of an idle dreamer or of a naive Alice, are perhaps of greater significance to us today than all the abstract philosophies and ideals preached by the thinkers of today put together. To free night-soil scavengers from their demeaning labour and instal hand-flush latrines throughout the country, cleaning up and deodorizing city streets and providing employment and training to hundreds and potentially thousands, to enable his countrymen and all who need his services to benefit from the expertize in the cons-

truction of inexpensive sanitation facilities, and to make sociology more practical and useful—are some of the major objectives and ingredients of Dr. Pathak's programme. A *Hindustan Times* correspondent has rightly underscored Dr. Pathak's importance when he declares that Sulabh International has brought about a mini-revolution in Bihar where municipalities are now extensively using this latrine, replacing service latrines. Dr. Pathak will be remembered by posterity as the initiator of some such concepts as construction and maintenance of public conveniences on pay-and-use basis, production of bio-gas from human excreta and its conversion into energy, provision of sanitary latrines and smokeless *chullahs* in rural areas, afforestation, maintenance of hand pumps, family welfare schemes and adult education, etc.

We are concerned here fundamentally with his role as an Ambedkarian, especially as it appears in his latest book *Road to Freedom* which is the only reliable sociological study on the abolition of scavenging in India. The book is Ambedkarian in its simple, unpretentious and unaffected prose style as well as in the efforts Dr. Pathak describes to liberate and rehabilitate the class of untouchable pariahs known as bhangis. The second chapter of this research-oriented, weighty work traces the history of the scavenging class down the ages and with an unmistakable hint of pity and compassion reminds the reader of certain factual details to which Ambedkar had been drawing the attention of the governing class as well as of the touchables:

> The scavengers (*Bhangis*) were placed at the lowest rung of the caste ladder. The nature of the job or work traditionally associated with them, or imposed upon them, pushed them to the lowest stratum of the social hierarchy of exterior castes. The task of cleaning night-soil was the most inferior job because this involved the touching of human excreta by the *Bhangis*. Consequently, they did not get social justice nor humane treatment. Being economically poor and socially backward, they could not revolt against the unjust sanctions nor could they rid themselves of the scavenging work.[2]

Denial of social justice and humane treatment to the scavengers had been the set theme of Ambedkar's *Writings and Speeches*. His

condemnation of the brāhmaṇic, Hindu world was balanced by his vision of a good, casteless and classless world where none would be a touchable or an untouchable. Where he was concerned with political issues and the rights and privileges of the suppressed classes his overwhelming interest in the uplift of the untouchables and in social reform compelled him to go to the extent of indicting Gandhi. To Dr. Pathak, however, "Mahatma Gandhi was the first to serve their cause and struggled for liberating the *Bhangis* from cleaning night-soil. In this way, he initiated the process leading to the liberation of scavengers and raised their status and position in society. Before Mahatma Gandhi appeared, nobody took up the cause of scavengers. When Mahatma Gandhi attended the National Congress Convention in Calcutta in 1901, he asked the volunteers not to engage scavengers. Surprisingly enough, the volunteers expressed their inability to do anything about it. Mahatma Gandhi set the pace by cleaning his own night-soil with the help of a broom (it was impossible for him individually to clean the night-soil of all volunteers)."[3]

Why this paean of praise for one who did nothing for the untouchables, one wonders? But is Dr. Pathak unduly exaggerating? Or is not there a suggestion of giving the Mahatma not even one iota more than what he deserved?

Though Gandhi has been a living influence on Dr. Pathak, he was no influence at all on Ambedkar. Ambedkar did not care. He was so invaded by the responsibility of uplifting the achuts that he cared for none who did not give preference to social reform and destroy the tentacles of caste system. Of the numerous fasts undertaken by Gandhi not one, according to Ambedkar, was undertaken for the vindication of untouchables' rights and privileges. Dr. Pathak is more Gandhi-esque than Ambedkarist.

It is where Dr. Pathak addresses himself to the problem of rehabilitating the liberated scavengers and bringing them back to the social mainstream by engaging them in appropriate vocations that he parts company with Gandhi and aligns himself with the Ambedkarians. Compassionate towards the suppressed classes, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, at once visionary and utilitarian, he shares Ambedkar's forthrightness, courage, especially of conviction, and originality. On many an occasion I heard him pronounce the very ideals and attitudes which find ex-

pression in some of Ambedkar's voluminous work. Dr. Pathak's attempt to reconcile Gandhi-esque ideal with advance-guard Ambedkarian *weltanschauung*, to combine misery and exaltation and to turn despair into affirmative creation, must be extremely difficult for him.

In the second passage from *Road to Freedom* quoted above, such expressions as 'struggled for liberating the *Bhangis*', 'he initiated the process', 'set the pace by cleaning his own night-soil' and the like are noteworthy. Gandhi's contribution to the liberation of the bhangis is summed up in these words, but his performance as described here has little of warm thanksgiving, warily worded though it certainly is. Dr. Pathak is 'surprized' to notice that "whereas in other fields of activity a number of people emerged and engaged themselves in social programmes and other constructive works, only a very few disciples of Mahatma Gandhi engaged themselves in the programme of liberating scavengers."[4] He appends to this statement a list of those notable persons who followed in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi. These notable philanthropists and social workers were Appa Saheb Patwardhan, Anna Saheb Dastane, Atre Guruje, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jiwan Lal, Jai Ram Das, Kesho Das Shah, Yugal Ram Vaidyave, Mama Saheb Phadke, Thakkar Bapa, Bithal Pharane, Sant Vinoba Bhave, Ballabh Swami, S.N. Murthi, R.R. Diwakar, Rameshwari Nehru, Bhau Narvekar, Viyogi Hari, Jaglal Choudhary, Sarayu Prasad and Rajendra Lal Das. Appa Saheb Patwardhan is singled out for special praise because he 'kept himself engaged in that pious work till the end of his life'. He is credited with devising a compost type of latrine known as *Gopuri*.

These persons are described *en masse* as 'only a very few disciples of Mahatma Gandhi'. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's pronounced, persistent opposition to Gandhi did not entitle him to this discipleship, though he had as much respect and reverence for the Mahatma as any other social reformer and political leader. By not giving Babasaheb the topmost priority in the list Dr. Pathak is not being disrespectful or indiscreet; he is only thinking in terms of such activities as pertained to the programme of liberating the scavengers. Moreover, Babasaheb did not take the same route to freedom Dr. Pathak has taken. He did not apply himself to the problem of those bhangis who were engaged in the

inhuman, unhealthy and hateful practice of carrying headloads of night-soil. His mission was multi-pronged with branches spreading out in several different directions. Dr. Pathak has chosen only one of the direst social evils; Babasaheb delved deeper and struck at the deadly root itself—the entire Hindu social structure with its oppressive, segregational sanctions against the menial classes. One of the most attractive elements in Dr. Pathak's work is its practical aspect. His *Road to Freedom* is no mere collection of theories but rather an interesting chronicle of what he himself has done to liberate those who for centuries were ostracized, segregated and suppressed by those whom they slavishly served. And all this chronicle goes on to show that there is nothing ordinary or coincidental about his initial and later successes. To accredit this entirely to talent, for which no laws or rules can be made, does not suffice in his case. An equally important factor is this reformer-scientist-idealist's humanitarian standards and untiring zeal.

Nevertheless he is, despite his brāhmaṇic lineage, an Ambedkarian reformer and his *Road to Freedom* matches well with Ambedkarism. In conversation after conversation, Dr. Pathak has expressed his disbelief in rigid, endogamous caste stratification. His advocacy of social reform is inerasably stamped with Ambedkarian values. He is a man of tolerance, understanding and devotion to truth—qualities manifest in his day-to-day behaviour and in his ceaseless effort to liberate the Indian scavengers and rehabilitate them by offering them alternative jobs and honourable occupations. If Gandhiji's cure for most of our social evils was a return to the soil and to universal hand labour, Dr. Pathak's cure for some of the evils plaguing our lives in the crowded cities is a return to environmental purity and to social justice and equality. His desire is to liberate all scavengers throughout the country, impart them fruitful training and absorb them, their children, their wives and their kinsfolk in civilized and dignified jobs. Because of his magnificent work and example, his pioneering Sulabh International and low-cost sanitation system, thousands of scavengers have been liberated without the bloodshed of a political revolution from the primitive condition of abject drudgery and illiteracy to a place of dignity in society.

I am reminded here of Dr. Pathak's unbounded creativity and limitless originality, due to which he is often acclaimed by those whom he has liberated as the greatest benefactor of humanity since Lord Buddha. In fact, what the critics say of Bertrand Russell is true of Dr. Pathak as well, for, like Russell, he, too, can produce a 'different system of philosophy every few years'. After the Sulabh International, therefore, came the Bio-gas from human excreta, the story of which is now well-known to every citizen of his home town.

How his scheme is beneficial not only to the excreta-carrying bhangis but also to the common citizen who cares for environmental purity and sanitation is revealed in the following lines. Dr. Pathak claims that

> On this basis it may be stated that the scheme of *Sulabh Shauchalaya* is not only favourable to the scavengers who are to be liberated, but also to citizens who are to switch over to a new system. It clearly suggests that the aspect of liberation involved in the *Sulabh Shauchalaya* scheme is attractive for the scavengers whereas the aspect of low-cost sanitation including the benefits of improved hygienic condition is attractive for the people in general. The ideal of liberation of scavengers through low-cost sanitation put forward by the *Sulabh Shauchalaya* system has a multi-pronged effects on society and is beneficial not only to the scavengers or to the adopters, but to the whole community from the social and economic points of view as well as from the medical, hygienic and humanitarian angles of vision.[5]

Ambedkarism is essentially a philosophy of humaneness and love for one and all, for equality is central to its creed, its very warp and woof, occupied and obsessed though it seems to be with the problems of the scheduled castes and tribes. Dr. Pathak, like Ambedkar, is aware of the pernicious, insane phobias let loose by casteists and caste-based politics. He hails from a state where caste-rabids indulge in indiscriminate bloodshed and form caste militias. As recently as early March 1992 the *Sunday* reported that "The Bara carnage is in a way symptomatic of the caste hatred spawned by the endless feuds of the caste-based militia.

Central Bihar has been turned into a veritable slaughter house by a chain of killings and counter-killings by extremist groups and the Senas (caste-based private militias), some of which are allegedly patronised by the major political parties like the Congress(I) and the Janata Dal."[6]

Dr. Pathak's hatred of all caste divisions is no less deep-rooted than Ambedkar's, but whereas the latter persistently storms at the brāhmaṇs and all those who harbour caste prejudices, Dr. Pathak maintains a discreet silence on this all-important issue. This does not mean that the system, so rigid and so seemingly indestructible, has had Dr. Pathak's approval. He repudiates it. Because of his concern for the well-being of the community as a whole, casteist activities do not answer to his egalitarian philanthropic mission. *Road to Freedom* is as much objective in its details and data-oriented with plenty of figures in tabular forms as it is a highly personal document revealing the innovative achievement of the author through the Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme. The book reveals the man Dr. Pathak is—a trail-blazing pioneer, a philanthrope, a zealous reformist radical of the noblest order. To these qualities may also be added those of his research-oriented writings—especially the consummate mastery of a style free from all rococo embellishment and baroque elaboration. He is plain, not commonplace. Like Ambedkar, he prefers pithiness to wordiness, straightforwardness to circumlocution.

Briefly outlining the advantages accruing from Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme, he claims that

> the *Sulabh Shauchalaya* scheme is in operation and a considerable number of scavengers have already been liberated through it. Along with the liberation of scavengers the implementation of the scheme has also resulted in the adoption of the low-cost sanitation system by the people. Hence, one of the objectives of the present study is to discover various patterns of action-sets activated by the adopters and the beneficiaries to obtain and enjoy the benefits of the scheme. It means that the present study aims at finding out the patterns of actions of the adopters for deriving benefit from this scheme. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine the experiences and action

patterns of those who have adopted the *Sulabh Shauchalaya* scheme.[7]

Lest one should think that Ambedkarism is a bee in my bonnet, I am not describing this passage as preponderately Ambedkarian, though in its stark prosiness and matter-of-fact, expository style it is not less effective than Ambedkar's effusive, discursive style. Dr. Pathak's is admittedly a more taut and relatively dense mode free from repetition and redundancy.

In the introduction to *Road to Freedom* Dr. Pathak gives evidence of his keen awareness of the problems involved in liberating the achuts. It is here that he also dwells on the ruinous effects of a rigid caste system and unquestioning faith in convention. He was rather shocked to realize that those who needed liberation were often averse to it, their aversion being due to what Dr. Pathak calls 'traditional social compulsions'. Of these compulsions there were four types: social, economic, religious and cultural. Whether these traditional compulsions would allow the scavengers to change their ancestral profession, to be liberated from the demeaning practice of carrying night-soil on their heads and thus to make a quantum leap on their march to freedom was a question he was expectedly confronted with. And he knew from the outset that his was not an easily surmountable problem. Thousands of years of oppression and experience of unapproachability, aeons of mute submission to social boycott, regarding it as an inescapable Providential verdict, were preventing the bhangis from smashing up the age-old bondages and developing 'a new set of social relations in the changed social climate'. "The degree of loyalty to traditional values and the intensity of willingness to break away from traditional ties," Dr. Pathak declares with due seriousness, "matter a lot in the liberation of scavengers. Thus, a change in their social orientation as well as in attitude is important before they welcome the liberated phase of life. From this point of view also, the analysis of 'value-factor', is essential for an in-depth study of the process of liberation of scavengers."[8]

Dr. Pathak's problems did not end with the reluctance of many of the scavengers to break away from traditional ties. To his utter dismay he noticed that there were also people who did not want

to do away with the dry latrine system. Their opposition to change, especially in the system of disposing of night-soil, and their unswerving loyalty to everything traditional stood in the way of bringing about the coveted liberation. "It is important to point out," Dr. Pathak admits with a touch of regret, "that only economic reasons are not responsible for the non-adoption of alternative systems of cleaning and disposing of night-soil by the people. There are affluent households where the traditional system is still favoured. It is obviously due to the dominance of traditional values and persistence of conservative views. Consequently, the study of liberation of scavengers as a value also demands the analysis of the values held by adopters and non-adopters of other alternative systems, leading to *Bhangi-Mukti*. This analysis of the values leads to include the understanding of the conflict between traditional and rational values in the objectives of the present study."[9]

Dr. Pathak, like Dr. Ambedkar, is another *enfant terrible* deeply antagonistic to those orthodox humbugs who irrationally cling to their ancestral practices and traditional systems. Both had a distaste for the dominance of conservative views and abhorred antiquarian values and phoney ritualism. Dr. Pathak is particularly concerned with the social and economic implications of liberation as an ideology and with liberation as a programme of action. The non-adopters of his system or the rejectors of the scheme of low-cost sanitation are not subjected to any vilification. Nor does Dr. Pathak advocate any blind anarchic revolt, though he does not like any meek submission to custom either. Maintaining his usual coolheadedness, he Socratically observes:

> The social implication of liberation may involve a conflict between the long-persisting practice of cleaning night-soil manually and the alternative ways of disposing it. The privileged section has been enjoying a respectable place in society and the scavengers or *Bhangis*, involved in this dirty and subhuman profession, have been looked down upon by these people. In case the *Bhangis* are liberated and they are no more involved in cleaning and carrying night-soil they will have to look for some alternative jobs. This occupational mobility will bring about a change in their social status and economic

> condition also, generating a change in social relationships. Such a change will obviously weaken traditional ties, resulting in a change of social structure and social system. The traditional bondages will be slowly replaced by rational ties causing social transformation. The privileged section of the traditional society may not favour this change in social climate to protect their dominant positions and they may strive to maintain traditional social ties. In this way, a number of social implications related to the conflict between traditional and rational values and the process of social transformation may be found in the liberation of scavengers. Consequently, the objectives of the present study also include the analysis of these social implications for a deeper insight into the problem.[10]

This excerpt has originated in Dr. Pathak's acute awareness of the need for social transformation of the unprivileged section of the traditional Hindu society. Like Ambedkar and other proponents of social reform, he is strongly in favour of a change in social structure and social system which, he conjectures, are bound to be slowly replaced by rational ties. It is in this light that his endeavour becomes ultimately Ambedkarian and assumes considerable social importance. He is rather undecided whether the privileged section of society will appreciate his grand scheme to change it, but Ambedkar was sure that the tradition-bound Hindu society does not favour any change in social climate, so committed it is to the protection of its dominant position. Dr. Pathak's indeterminancy does not however fail to express his rejection of traditional bondages and occupational immobility nor to hide the fact that he wants a change in the social status and economic condition of the bhangis. That he has as deep an insight into the problems of the unprivileged as Ambedkar had goes without saying. This is also exhibited by his analysis of the economic implications of the programme of liberation of the scavenging class. With sharp psychological perception he points out why some scavengers may not like to give up scavenging. He refers to their fear that once they give up their basic means of livelihood they will be out of job. That explains his emphasis on providing them with some alternative jobs. "Consequently," he maintains, "simultaneous schemes for their rehabilitation are

inevitable along with the programme of liberation to make the programme effective. It is also important to note that the alternative job must fetch at least the same money they got for scavenging. The liberation scheme cannot work successfully without taking this factor into consideration. Hence, the analysis of economic aspect of liberation also constitutes an important objective of [the] present study."[11]

This is but one of several passages in which the purpose of the study is brought home to the reader. The classical passage, however, which sounds typically Ambedkarian is as follows:

> The process of liberation of scavengers involves not only value-conflict, rehabilitation and change in the means of livelihood; it is also closely related to the change in social status and patterns of social relationship. The liberation of scavengers and their rehabilitation involve occupational mobility which is a negation of rigid hereditary system of determining one's occupation. In the caste-ridden Indian society, every caste or sub-caste was associated with a particular occupation under sacred sanctions and the belief in divine decree. Every individual was destined to follow the occupation of his or her own caste and the occupation was fixed, hereditary and unalterable for an individual as well as for a group known as caste or sub-caste. Thus, there was no occupational mobility in the traditional social order. The status of every individual as well as of every caste or sub-caste was also fixed. It is obvious that the occupational mobility following the liberation of the scavengers will bring about a change in the social status of the *Bhangis*. The notion of pollution associated with cleaning night-soil will cease to be operative after liberation from this sub-human job and the liberated scavengers will aspire for a higher social status.[12]

Where there is no occupational mobility, as there was none in the traditional social order, when the occupation is fixed, hereditary and unalterable, there is no freedom, no social justice, no equality. This is indeed the all-important theme which reverberates throughout the whole of Ambedkar literature and to which Dr. Pathak also seeks to draw our attention. Both Ambedkar and

Pathak accept the challenge of dead convention. Break what must be broken, they declare, once and for all, and free the toiling masses enslaved to the privileged minority from the bondage of caste, hitherto deemed hereditary and unalterable. Bring the dalits their long-due freedom and power. Upon all oppressed, terrorized, trembling humanity and upon all dalits shed the nectar of your loving kindnesses and your love of freedom! This is your goal, remember that!

No wonder that both Ambedkar and Dr. Pathak are regarded as two great champions of the oppressed. Their movement has shown the dalits the broad highway to freedom already bright with the dawn of a new future. This liberation of the scavenging class, of the untouchables is in fact the beginning of something altogether new and different—the emergence of a social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity, an order in which worth, not birth is the measure of an individual's greatness.

It is no less interesting to note Dr. Pathak's intelligent awareness of the fact that the process of liberation is not a unilateral one: it is multilateral and multi-dimensional, "requiring reciprocatory behaviours not only from the *Bhangis*, voluntary and official agencies, but also from the members of the community to be affected by [the] liberation scheme. It is obvious that the people using dry latrines so far will have to adopt the low-cost sanitation scheme for doing away with the old system. Without adoption of low-cost sanitation scheme, the liberation process cannot achieve its goal. Hence, the response of the community to the low-cost sanitation scheme aiming at the liberation of scavengers matters a lot."[13]

Dr. Pathak has, like Ambedkar, examined the problem of the achuts and their liberation from all important angles and with microscopic attention to details. In the sense that they are both products of the same casteist order in which an untouchable is treated with inhuman callousness and the brāhmaṇ is deemed the most honoured and privileged, they have certain turns of thought in common. Generally speaking, they both divide humanity into two unequal parts—the privileged and the under-or un-privileged —and this binary conception tends to command their outlook. For both the mass of dalits have suffered long socially, economically and politically; a large number of them are segregated,

muted, marginalized panchamas who cannot help but allow themselves to be exploited or, where no such exploitation takes place, stay put outside the main social stream while a small number of the so-called superior classes permit themselves to overstep all barriers. Dr. Pathak, who has pondered the problem of reservation a good deal, feels, like all adherents of Ambedkarism, that a massive regeneration movement (like the Sulabh Shauchalaya movement) is required for the uplift of 'those castes and communities which are *de facto* nearly as backward as the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe bracket'. It is these communities that need to be 'placed in the reservation basket education-and-employment wise'. All Ambedkarians realize that "bourgeois jobbery should not lure the backward-most classes into the illusion that a few glittering positions will make a qualitative change in their social, economic and educational status. What is needed, therefore, is a massive programme focused on the backward classes, especially the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe sector, for their economic, occupational, educational and eultural regeneration."[14] The Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme has been launched in response to this demand for a massive regeneration programme.

Dr. Pathak is not bothered about brāhmaṇism as such nor about the śāstras on which he has written nothing. My informal conversations with him have convinced me that there is only one thing that bothers him: how to uplift the scavengers and enroll those who would be willing to adopt their families. His mission, he says, will remain an unrealized dream so long as all the scavengers, in whatever state they are, are not liberated, rehabilitated and given alternative jobs. He has a heart aboudingly compassionate like Ambedkar's, like the Buddha's.

But this sounds like an over-simplification of personalities that are not flat abstractions or their mere embodiments. Being round and live, they are complex, if not elusive, at the same time—elusive like all living human beings, ever becoming, ever changing. Observed in proper perspective, either of them would reveal two visions, a major and a minor one. The major one, expressing his passionate hatred of caste and compassion for the dehumanized downtrodden, has been more than sufficiently written about, whereas the minor one, the religious vision, has not evoked much interest. Moreover, even when interpreters have noted this vision

they tend to distort it in the attempt to interweave it into his more central and characteristic concerns. Both are in a sense deeply religious, though they hardly ever say so. Since to both real religion lives in the heart of man, they do not derive their faith from any particular śāstra nor believe in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies. Their compassion for the downtrodden, their unceasing struggle to redeem their lot and their stress on the desirability of fostering spiritual values and morality are all prompted by a temperament profoundly religious. There is no denying the fact that both Ambedkar and Pathak have exerted a revolutionary influence on Indian life, but at bottom their activities, their world view, their philosophy of life stem from their deep faith in those moral and ethical values which are the very essence of all religious faith. All we can say is that into their faith—Buddhism and Hinduism—both injected their revolutionism. Their championship of the oppressed humanity has often taken the form of ideas so apocalyptic as to disintegrate the traditional and institutional sanctions of Hinduism, yet the driving motive of both Ambedkar and Pathak is thoroughly soaked in egalitarianism which is to most of us synonymous with religion.

Before closing this chapter it needs to be stressed that whatever be the nature of their religiosity, there is no stasis in it but rather a dynamism destructive of caste inequality and seeking fulfilment in the liberation of the oppressed classes, bhangis and untouchables. We cannot accuse them of deviating from the true spirit of religion and of promoting anarchism and atheism. Let us not forget that Ambedkar had been wedded to Buddhist ideals ever since he read the life of Gautama and Dr. Pathak is known for his unshakable faith in the intrinsic goodness of Hinduism.

The present-day interest in the dalit future has brought both Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Pathak under the lime-light of publicity. There is no doubt at all that their names are well worthy to be mentioned along with Gandhi's and that they, like the Mahatma, must be considered two of the greatest and most equalitarian social democrats of all time. If one wants to know the value of their contribution one should read the following tribute paid to Ambedkar, a tribute which is applicable also to Dr. Pathak: "He was a great dissenter against the unjust social order but the value of his dissenting voice was not negative. His protest was

positive and a vote for the construction of a just system where everyone had the freedom to assert his views, unafraid of defying tyrants. Cradled in the ideology of liberty propagated by Mill and surrounded by a social milieu where suffocating devotion to fuehrers in disguise deprived the people of their independent initiative, Dr. Ambedkar was an individualist and never resigned himself to the abject surrender to the fuehrer syndrome."[15]

Both Dr. Ambedkar and Pathak are great dissenters against the unjust social order. Dr. Pathak's Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme is a living testimony to the fact that the value of his social dissidence is as positive as Ambedkar's. If Ambedkar struggled for the construction of a just system based on equality and freedom of speech, Pathak too has struggled to achieve the same end and liberate the bhangis *en bloc*. The difference lies in the fact that while Ambedkar was fed on the ideology of liberty propagated by Mill, Dr. Pathak was cradled in the ideology of social service sponsored by Mahatma Gandhi.

What is noteworthy is also Dr. Pathak's refusal to employ any violent means to achieve his end. The liberation programme has continued to be gone through, planned and executed with meticulous accuracy and strictly according to schedule. In this he reminds us of Ambedkar's abiding faith in constitutional methods of achieving social and economic objectives. Never had the bhangis to agitate for their liberation under Dr. Pathak's leadership. The founder of the Sulabh International movement shares Babasaheb's conviction expressed in his speech on November 25,1949:

> If we wish to maintain democracy not merely in form, but also in fact, what must we do? The first thing in my judgement we must do is to hold fast to constitutional methods of achieving our social and economic objectives. It means we must abandon the bloody methods of civil disobedience, non-cooperation and satyagraha. When there was no way left for constitutional methods for achieving economic and social objectives, there was a great deal of justification for unconstitutional methods. But where constitutional methods are open, there can be no justification for these unconstitutional methods. These methods are nothing but the Grammar of

> Anarchy and the sooner they are abandoned, the better for us.[16]

The significance of adopting a constitutional method to achieve a noble social purpose has not been lost upon Dr. Pathak. From the very beginning of the crusade against scavenging he had led the bhangis exactly as Dr. Ambedkar wanted them to be led. When he speaks of the Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme as being compatible with the social and economic conditions of the users and with the ideals of social liberty, justice and welfare of the downtrodden his humanism approximates that of Babasaheb and when he speaks of the liberation of the scavengers, he means real liberation—economic and social first and political next. Once bhangis are economically liberated and employed in honourable professions, their rise from the bottom rung of the social scale would be assured.

Both Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Pathak "indubitably and outstandingly brought the sharpest focus to bear on the issue of social degeneracy in society which paid lip service to universal divinity and human oneness but practised for centuries graded inequalities and inflicted savageries on their own brothers and sisters whose misfortune was to be born in Antyaja wombs." There was however no inconsiderable difference between the reactions of the two leaders. Dr. Pathak seethed and raged within himself; he pondered long and then stumbled upon the great idea: the Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme. He had seen the dregs of the cities, the bhangis carrying night-soil upon their heads; he had seen their misery and suffering writ large upon every expressive lineament of their faces. He had real sensitivity, real empathy but he did not agitate, though it was not the sort of spectacle for a noble heart to see, let alone feel. He thought of the Sulabh Shauchalaya scheme, launched it without much fanfare, and started on his cherished mission—on the road to freedom. Without venting his anger, he, a born polite protester, laid the foundation of his scheme and saw it fructifying in town after town and city after city and gradually growing into a gigantic international organisation. This is a kind of inverted militancy.

The way Dr. Ambedkar expressed his protest, though consti-

tutional, was different. Contrasting his contribution with Gandhi's, Justice Iyer tries to erase the common impression stampted on the minds of the post-Independence generation that Gandhiji was the principal saviour of the achuts of India. However, Iyer remarks, "when we consider the stature and achievement of Ambedkar as an intrepid warrior for social-economic liberation of the lowliest, the lost and the last, especially the dalits and the exploited tribals, there is no doubt that without diminishing the tremendous conscientisation of the Hindu community by Gandhiji vis-a-vis untouchability and Harijan debasement, Bhim Ramji Ambedkar's (sic) ceaseless war on behalf of the panchama proletariat, in its widest connotation, is incomparable. And yet, the irony of history is that as the House passed the provision abolishing untouchability on November 29,1948, the hallowed walls resounded with shouts of Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai, although present at the Session as Chairman of the Drafting Committee was Dr. Ambedkar, an 'untouchable' himself and Commander-in-Chief of the Untouchable Army which waged a war against the reactionary system which sustained the social *status quo ante*. When the pre-Independence saga of India comes to be written, only prejudice can assign a higher role in the liberation of the backwardmost brackets to anyone above Ambedkar. While both Gandhi and Ambedkar were symbols of the revolt against the caste-conscious oppressors within the Hindu fold, they chose different paths, different strategies and different ideologies. If Gandhi was a deliverer of Indians, including the weakest sector, from the British Raj, Ambedkar was the spearhead of Balck Power against the varṇa front. There were many issues on which the two militant giants would not agree for the obvious reason that Gandhiji wanted reform to end injustice, while Ambedkar demanded rebellion for the annihilation of the caste system itself. Gandhiji was a Vyasa and insisted on eradication of shudrahood and untouchability. Ambedkar was a mahar and indignantly insisted on the abolition of the varṇa structure, thereby levelling up all castes into one oceanic unity or human *sagara*. Ambedkar was a historic necessity, a dialectical demand if social democracy was to be India's desideratum. It was, and he became the symbol of social liberation of Depressed Classes and

of Womanhood. He joined Government to advance the cause and quit it when he was betrayed from within. The fire of this *mahar* was rare in the Indian public life of his time."[17]

This is an inimitably judicious assessment of Gandhi and Ambedkar which none else could make with the same amazing, extraordinary confidence. In his characteristic forceful manner Iyer adds to this appraisal a complementary sentence: "To go against Gandhi, to fight the National Congress, to demand equal share of power for the Depressed Classes, to draft legislations for womanhood's equality needed the courage of an iconoclast, and Ambedkar was just that."

Though Dr. Pathak looks upon his mission as a continuation of that of Mahatma Gandhi, his radicalism has registered far-reaching consequences: It has shocked his contemporaries as did Ambedkar's and shaken the very pillars of society. His resolve to allow the Harijans to offer ritual worship conducted by orthodox brāhmaṇs in temples and to allot a piece of land to every landless person in his village is not only startling but revolutionary. He has an apparent aversion to casteism, and it seems likely that he is ashamed of the caste-system which has split the Indian society into so many warring communities. The persistence of this demeaning system, like scavenging, had made Pathak a rebel. As an implacable idealist, he holds stubbornly to his purpose, i.e., the liberation of all poor people from poverty, casteism, religious dogmas, and unemployment but unlike other unflinching visionaries, he does not allow his purpose to harden into inflexible will and drag all his associates and himself into an idealistic doom.

Both Babasaheb and Bindeshwar are convinced that democracy is meaningless without what Justice Iyer calls 'progressive elimination of caste disparities by positive upgradation of backward communities'. Pathak's field of action has no doubt been limited, for he is not concerned with such an upgradation of all backward communities. *Road to Freedom* reveals the nature of his mission and preoccupation, which is the liberation of a section, pure and simple, of these communities. In this limited arena the champion has done well. If he has chosen to work in a limited field and won success, Babasaheb in his more extensive field did not win as much success as is commensurate with the holy intensity of his

ambition. He awakened the marginalised dalits; Bindeshwar is leading the bhangis on their road to freedom. Both are Ambedkarians inseparably wedded to the ideals of equality, freedom and a humane laissez-faire.

Notes

1. Published in 1991 by Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Delhi.
2. Bindeshwar Pathak, *Road to Freedom* (Delhi, 1991), p. 39.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
6. *Sunday*, 1-7 March, 1992, p. 11.
7. Bindeshwar Pathak, *op, cit.*, p. 18.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
14. *I.D.F.*, p. 119.
15. *I.D.F.*, pp. 30-31.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
17. *I.D.F.*, pp. 33-34.

6

Sudrahood and Reservation

SUDRAHOOD

The most interesting problem in reading Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is to reconcile its two sides, the Buddhistic-idyllic and the militant politician. This can easily lead to trouble, or by stressing his radical views on Hinduism and on such celebrities as Manu and Gandhi one may deem the other side secondary, particularly because this aspect of the man is not as pronounced as the other. Babasaheb himself prompts us to consider his militancy more than his religiosity. At the risk of being rather schematic I would suggest that the Buddhistic-idyllic side of his work may profitably be regarded as an analogue of and an emanation from his political side. He became a Buddhist because of his aversion to an order based on brāhmaṇic supremacy and casteism and because of centuries of marginalization and oppression to which the śūdras were subjected.

His views on socio-political matters—radical views testifying to his deep-embedded militancy—are often found pell-mell in unexpected places and in unexpected contexts. While speaking in the Bombay Legislature on 12 March 1927 on grants for education, he pleaded that "equality of treatment to people who are unequal is simply another name for indifferentism and neglect."[1] His argument was backed by the statement that India is composed of different communities unequal in their status and progress. If the government were to bring them to the level of equality the only course was "to adopt the principle of inequality and to give favoured treatment to those who are below the level."[2] Rejecting the principle of equality of treatment, Babasaheb initiated the

debate on reservation and fired the first salvo against the advanced Hindus who, he said, were fourth in order of population but first in order of college education, first in order of secondary education and also first in order of primary education. Having given an idea of this comparative disparity in the educational advancement of the different communities, he lodges his complaint "that the government has not yet thought fit to apply this principle (of inequality = reservation = favoured treatment) to the backward classes." He follows this argument by making a fervent appeal that to the handicapped backward classes the principle of favoured treatment must be applied. In support of this line of argument he musters the following pleas:

> Economically speaking or socially speaking, backward classes are handicapped in a manner in which no other community is handicapped. I, therefore, think that the principle of favoured treatment must be adopted in their case. As I have shown, their position is worse than that of the Mahomedans and my only pleading is that if the most favoured treatment is to be given to those who deserve it and need it most, then the backward classes deserve more attention of the Government than do the Mahomedans. That is the question which I prominently wish to place before this House, and I urge upon the Honourable the Minister for Education that he should adopt the same methods and principle towards the uplift of the backward classes as have been adopted towards the uplift of the Mahomedan community.[3]

It must be borne in mind that implicit in this plea is the assumption that the depressed classes do not belong to any of the Hindu classes. According to Babasaheb, they have been called Hindus for political purposes, but the Hindus never acknowledge them socially as their brethren. Babasaheb was sorely aggrieved because the Hindus had "taken to themselves all the political advantage which our numbers, which our voting strength, have given to them, but in return we have received nothing. All that we have received is a treatment which is worse than the treatment that they themselves have accorded to other communities whom

they do not call Hindus. That must be the first thing, therefore, that we want done."[4]

One of the aims of Babasaheb's life-long struggle was to protect the interests of the underprivileged classes, their aspirations and their desire for advancement and betterment. For this he sought adequate representation of these classes on each local body. Expressing his dissatisfaction with the way educational affairs were being handled by the Government, he points out that the "Council in transferring education to the local bodies has practically postponed the spread of education among the masses *sine die* and in doing so has gravely erred. But, Sir, this is only preliminary to the point which I wish to make, namely that the people who are the greatest sufferers by this wrong are the depressed classes. With great respect to the Honourable the Minister for Local Self-Government, I am impelled to say that his local boards are conceived after the fashion of money houses in a museum where the aim of the curator is to make room for one individual of every species. Sir, there is only one representative of the depressed classes provided in each local body. What is the utility of having only one representative of these classes? I cannot understand. If, for instance, the representation of the depressed classes in a local board is intended to force upon the local board the policy which is in the interests of the depressed classes, it is futile. For, certainly, one man cannot count in a body of ten or twelve. I hear complaints from all parts of the presidency that, under the present regime, the depressed classes find themselves in a most helpless condition. They are surrounded by people who by no means share their aspirations or their desires for advancement and betterment. There is, therefore, all the greater necessity, I say that this Government should employ certain inspecting agency under their direct control which will see [to it] that the depressed classes are not neglected by the bodies to whose charge such an important subject like education has been entrusted."[5]

In speech after speech he indicted those institutions, whether social, government or private, which worked in a manner detrimental to the interest of the backward or disadvantaged classes. One such speech was delivered on July 27, 1927 when Dr. Ambedkar had to express his view in the Bombay Legislature on the Bombay University Act Amendment Bill. One of the things

he said on this occasion was that we in India are mostly communal people, that the Hindus and the Muslims constituted as they are, cannot honestly say that they are non-communal in their attitude towards each other. When Rao Bahadur R. R. Kale and a few other members challenged their statement, Dr. Ambedkar reiterated his stand with due vehemence, declaring that there could be no gainsaying about this that every Hindu and every Mahomedan is born in a certain caste or a community. "There is no gainsaying," he reminded the members on the floor of the House, "that we are brought up and bred up in a communal environment. We share the aspirations and the ambitions of that community; we feel the disabilities of that community and, consequently, there can be no doubt in my mind that every member in this House as well as outside is bound to look at every question consciously or unconsciously from a communal point of view."[6] Though Ambedkar was only thirty-six he had developed a supreme talent for dialectics in compensation for his adverse social condition. He not only deplored the attitude of the honourable members who objected to the label 'communal' thus being attached to them, but also described it as hypocritical. It is, he remarked, absolutely hypocritical to shout 'No'. He himself looked at every question that came up before this House, he honestly admitted, from a communal point of view and he asked himself whether it would be good for the depressed classes. Debunking communalism then rampant in the country everywhere, he retorted when K. F. Nariman said 'Sorry': "Those who say 'sorry' are themselves not free from communalism. It is very easy to talk about non-communalism, because it is only talk. We know, Sir, that we are so minded that we cannot, for instance, associate with other communities on terms of equality, that whenever we want to marry our daughters we begin to ask whether the bridegroom to be is a man of our own caste or not, when we want to invite guests for dinner we commence to enquire whether they are members of our own community . . . ."[7] When he was challenged by B. G. Pahalajani he elaborated his viewpoint and bluntly stated, stripping his words of all tortuous varnishing, that it is sheer hypocrisy to say that we do not do these things. He wished the honourable members to realize that that was a defect for which he did not accuse any

particular community. He admitted that it was a blemish from which they all suffered. That being so, he further said, it ought to be recognized that no single community, however intellectually advanced, could be the guardian of other community.

Led once again by his fetishistic attitude towards the depressed classes, Ambedkar accused the Bombay University of not being encouraging to the students of the backward communities. He wanted these students to be given some additional, legitimate concession, some kind of 'reservation'. He questioned the legitimacy of holding simultaneous examinations, saying that he did not understand what virtue there was in demanding that a particular candidate who appeared at an examination should pass in all the papers at one shot. The children of the moneyed aristocracy could spare time to attend the colleges during the day and who could devote their whole time to education. But, asked Dr. Ambedkar, "what about the poor, the poverty-stricken parent, who requires his son to earn in the day time to add to the family earnings in order to make both ends meet? What about the boy who finds very little during the 12 hours of the day to devote to university education? Surely, if the University was mindful of the economic condition of the backward communities, it certainly would not have persisted in a system of simultaneous examinations which in my opinion is absolutely unjustified and absurd."[8] When K.M. Munshi remarked that the University had been doing everything without showing any preference of any kind to anybody, Dr. Ambedkar informed the House that one of his friends, who had been nominated to the University Senate, had twice moved a resolution in the Senate that candidates belonging to the depressed classes who appeared at the University examinations should be shown some concession in the matter of fees. He was told by his friend that the proposition was twice turned down by the Senate.

Dr. Ambedkar pleaded for special concessions for depressed-class students.

He informed the members that it had been everywhere recognized, even by the Government, that the communities economically poor did require certain special concessions in order that they might attain the same level on which the other communities were. To him this was a wise principle which the Senate must

appreciate and understand; if it did not, then, Ambedkar submitted, "such a Senate can never be the guardian of the interests of the backward classes at all."[9]

Defending his demand for special concession, he reminded the members of the Senate that they constituted a legislative body which had to put forth the needs of the backward communities and to suggest the facilities that were necessary for meeting them. They had, he added, in that Legislative Council members from the depressed classes, who were appointed not because they desired to displace any honourable members who were sitting there on the Government side but their sole business there was to point out to the Government what the needs of those communities were which were suffering under disabilities. Before he closed he emphatically refuted the argument put forth by one of the members belonging to the Swaraj Party in favour of the demand for provincial autonomy and made the following memorable declaration:

> But, Sir, I beg to submit that when three-fourths of the population is drenched in ignorance and does not know its rights and responsibilities there can be no hope of autonomy. If we do get self-government notwithstanding the fact that three-fourths of the population is drenched in ignorance, our representative system will be a sham, and there would be a rule of wealth against poverty, of power against weakness. That is really what it will be. I, therefore, say, Sir, that if we desire to have provincial autonomy, we must ensure two things. One thing is that every access must be given to every grade of modern education to the communities which are educationally backward, in order that they may realise their rights and liabilities of citizenship, and secondly, in order that every access may be given to these communities, it is absolutely necessary, under the present circumstances, that special representation should be provided for them.[10]

The demand for special concessions for the depressed classes in every sphere of life is foreshadowed in many of Ambedkar's early speeches like the ones we have referred to here. He demanded these concessions for the marginalised panchamas and dalits

who, his feeling senses perceptually and conceptually realized, lived a sort of hand-to-mouth existence and needed special treatment, for, in his view, they hardly lived at all. So great was the premium which the Hindu śāstras had placed upon the upper caste for centuries that only special concessions and reservation could uplift these teeming millions of the panchamas. In the little world of his childhood Ambedkar, a mlecha boy almost of no account in the eyes of others, must now force the caste-Hindu parasites to pay the penalty for grabbing for aeons all the social, economic and political benefits which could also have gone to his fellowmen.

Babasaheb had his own view of the functions of a university. He disagreed with Munshi's contention that a university is a body for the purpose of making statutes and regulations, that it is a body entrusted with the task of holding examinations and providing post-graduate courses in the university departments of education. Strongly reacting to this view, Dr. Ambedkar described it as 'very narrow'. Speaking in support of the amendment to the Bombay University Bill moved by Noor Mohmed to raise the number of nominated senators from 40 to 50, he insisted on the value of higher education for the needy and the poor. He warned the senators against their undue absorption in framing statutes and regulations and reminded them that 'Both as a person who takes an interest in university reform and as one coming from the backward communities' he was in fundamental disagreement with Munshi. It was there that he let his view of the fundamental functions of a university known to his listeners. On October 5, 1927 when this debate was held, he declared that as he understood the meaning of the word 'university', one of its essential functions was "to provide facilities for bringing the highest education to the doors of the needy and the poor."[11] There was no university in any civilized country, he further declared, which could justify its existence if it merely dealt with the problems of examinations and the granting of degrees. He also emphasized as fundamental the need for accepting 'as a corollary that the backward communities should have some control in the University affairs.' "Sir," he forcibly enlarged upon his view, "it is said that the University is primarily a concern of the intelligentsia and of the educated classes, and that as the Uni-

versity is to function properly it is necessary that it should be controlled by what are called the educated classes. I would accept that principle, if the educated classes who are going to control the University possessed what we called social virtues. If they, for instance, sympathised with the aspirations of the lower classes, if they recognised that the lower classes had rights, if they recognised that those rights must be respected, then probably we, coming from the backward communities, might well entrust our destinies to what are called the advance [sic] communities."[12]

The idea that 'the lower classes had rights' runs through the entire gamut of Dr. Ambedkar's writings and speeches; he now calls attention to 'the bitterest experience of the rule of what are called the higher and the educated classes'. Explaining what he meant by this pronouncement, he stated that it was hardly to the credit of the advanced classes that there should exist in India a large segment of the population known as the criminal tribes and a population which is deemed untouchable. Surely, he added, the advanced classes could have raised the status of the depressed and the criminal classes and brought their advanced culture to the latter. Had they only the desire to do so, they would certainly have made the depressed classes equal to themselves, said Ambedkar, who was more than certain that the savarnas had never done so in the past and were not likely to do anything in that direction in future. "By their callous neglect of us and by their active hostility to our progress," he further said, "they have convinced us that they are really our enemies. There is no doubt that it is their desire to keep us where we are. I do not wish to refer to the debate that has gone on for the last few days. But there is not the slightest doubt about the fact that the opposition benches which looked upon [the] Government as their enemy sided with it now with the sole object of defeating us on this vital question. There is no other excuse for their conduct except that they wanted to defeat the claims of the backward communities for representation through nomination. It is for that reason that they have joined [the] Government whom they opposed in season and out of season. Sir, can we have any trust in an intelligentsia so narrow, so illiberal in its views?"[13]

This repeated disparagement of the upper, advanced classes is

no *indigesta turba* of disenchantments and criticisms; it is the true voice of feeling.

On K.M. Munshi's remark that he did not consent to the introduction of communal representation on the Senate for the simple reason that the question was not one of any division of material benefits, Dr. Ambedkar commented that the backward communities cared more for intellectual enlightenment, a great gain in itself, than for material benefits. After all, he asseverated, education is the greatest material benefit for which one can fight. Of the rights and opportunities of these classes of people, he spoke confidently and asserted that they might forego material benefits of civilization but they could not forego their rights and opportunities to reap the benefits of the highest education to the fullest extent. That, he further asserted, was the importance of that question from the point of view of his people who had at last realized that without education their existence was jeopardized. It was for this reason that he was fighting for increase of seats and pleading that the number of the nominated seats should be increased for ensuring adequate representation of the backward classes. Before concluding his speech he made it clear that it could never be guaranteed that the principals of different colleges who had got direct representation would necessarily be friendly to the backward communities, for he had had sufficient experience of these principals and was sure that those who would be elected to the Senate would be from the upper classes. Dr. Ambedkar, familiar with them as he was, added that they would never come to the rescue of the backward classes who were clamouring for education.

If he made his demands often with rather inordinate, impetuous insistence, that was because of his own first-hand knowledge of the plight of the depressed segment, particularly of his own people, Mahars. Of his wide-ranging and insightful knowledge of these people and of their heart-searing miseries there are many eloquent testimonies, one of which is his speech on the Hereditary Offices Act Amendment Bill made on August 3, 1928. Other speeches on the subject are equally revelatory of the way he empathized with the Mahar population. In his speeches on the Village Panchayats Bill again he sought special representation for

the minorities and, surprisingly, defended communalism. The inveterate non-conformist and radical that he was, he expressed his dislike of the system of village panchayats in scathing terms and described it as 'the bane of public life'. These so-called rural republics, he remarked, were responsible for not letting a national spirit grow in the country. "If India has not succeeded in producing nationalism," he declared in his usual assertive manner, "if India has not succeeded in building up a national spirit, the chief reason for that in my opinion is the existence of the village system. It made all people saturated with local particularism, with local patriotism. It left no room for larger civic spirit. None whatever. Under the ancient village panchayats, India, instead of being a country of a united people, became a loose conglomeration of village communities with no common tie except common allegiance to a common King. I am glad to say, Sir, that this is not my opinion alone. A member of the committee which was appointed in 1925 expressed himself in that same strain. I refer to the minute of my friend Mr. R.G. Pradhan."[14] He also objected to the constitution of the panchayats themselves, for the Bill provided that the panchayats should be elected on the basis of adult suffrage. He made it clear that adult suffrage was in no way 'sufficient' for the depressed classes who were in 'a miserable minority' in every village and that in no case would adult suffrage convert a minority into a majority. He was bound therefore to insist that if the village panchayats came into existence, there should be special representation for the depressed classes. A section of the members in the House, he added, would no doubt call such a demand communalism, but he was quite convinced, in fact too convinced, that communalism must be his policy. He announced that he was not ashamed of it, that India could not proceed, in his opinion at any rate, on the road to political progress without communalism. Reiterating the same view once again, he said that without it (communalism) there could be no self-government for India. That was the proposition he would assert without fear of challenge. He would never accept the principle of self-government unless he was satisfied that every self-governing institution had provisions in it which assured the depressed classes of special representation in order to protect their rights, and until that was done, he would not assent to the

first part of the Bill. The second part was to him worse than the curate's egg—not only bad in some parts but rotten in others as well.

Such examples of his vindication of dalit rights are legion. He never ceased pleading for special representation of the depressed classes by nomination on the village panchayats. He accounted for advancing such a plea by saying that no panchayat could administer justice if it were elected by the adult population of the village. How could one expect, he asked, that a judge who has to submit himself to the suffrage of the masses will not think twice before doing justice or whether, in the case of a culpable voter, he will not be inclined to exonerate him or be reluctant to hurt his sensibility? In support of his contention that adult suffrage would cause more harm than ensure justice to the members of the panchayats, Ambedkar refers to the constitution of the judiciary by election in America. He had, he admitted, never seen anywhere a judiciary that was elected. The only country where he knew the judiciary was elected was America. He reminded the House that such a practice of electing judges had brought the judiciary into disrepute in all the American Commonwealth and had turned justice into a byword for corruption. He could not, therefore, "accept the principle embodied in the second part of the Bill, that judicial powers, both civil and criminal, should be handed over to a panchayat, which, in substance, is an elective judiciary."[15] Speaking as the true representative and spokesman of the depressed classes, he made it known that "we can never consent to judicial affairs being administered by a panchayat. Ours is a very peculiar and, if I may say so, a very pitiable position. We are a small body of people, occupying a corner of a village. We are never looked upon as part and parcel of the village community. Although living in the village, we are all the same an alien body, whose progress is looked upon with great jealousy by the rest of the community. My honourable friend Mr. Kamat shakes his head, and therefore I think I must read to him from the report of the State Committee, which I did not want to do. In paragraph 102 of that Committee's report, the condition of the depressed classes in the village is described at great length. This is what the Committee say:

" 'Although we have recommended various remedies to secure to the Depressed Classes their rights to all public utilities, we fear that there will be difficulties in the way of their exercising them for a long time to come. The first difficulty is the fear of open violence against them by orthodox classes. It must be noted that the Depressed Classes form a small minority in every village, opposed to which is a great majority of the orthodox who are bent on protecting their interests and dignity from any supposed invasion by the Depressed Classes at any cost. The danger of prosecution by the Police has put a limitation upon the use of violence by the orthodox classes and consequently such cases are rare.

" 'The second difficulty arises from the economic position in which the Depressed Classes are found today. The Depressed Classes have no economic independence in most parts of the Presidency. Some cultivate the lands of the orthodox classes as their tenants at will. Others live on their earnings as farm labourers employed by the orthodox classes and the rest subsist on the food or grain given to them by the orthodox classes in lieu of service rendered to them as village servants. We have heard of numerous instances where the orthodox classes have used their economic power as a weapon against those Depressed Classes in their villages, when the latter have dared to exercise their rights, and have evicted them from their land, and stopped their employment and discontinued their remuneration as village servants. This boycott is often planned on such an extensive scale as to include the prevention of the Depressed Classes from using the commonly used paths and the stoppage of sale of the necessaries of life by the village Bania. According to the evidence sometimes small causes suffice for the proclamation of a social boycott against the Depressed Classes. Frequently it follows on the exercise by the Depressed Classes of their right to the use of the common well, but cases have been by no means rare where a stringent boycott has been proclaimed simply because a Depressed Class man has put on the sacred thread, has bought a piece of land, has put on good clothes or ornaments, or has carried a marriage procession with a bridegroom on the horse through the public street.' "[16]

On February 10, 1933 Dr. Ambedkar spoke once again on the

Village Panchayats Bill and, having stated some truisms—"India is not Europe", "England is not India", "England does not know caste system"—maintained that if there was any good in the Indian Constitution that was in the offing, it was the recognition of the principle of communal representation. This was the sort of representation that he favoured most and defended with all his oratorical forcefulness. He was not ashamed of what he was saying, he declared. "I know, and I am saying, that it is going to be one of the best parts of the Indian Constitution. We do not want, I do not want, the mere right to go to the ballot box and not knowing who is my representative, or if there is going to be any representative to represent me at all. I want a system in which not only I will have a right to go to the ballot box, but I will have a right to have a body of people belonging to my own class who will be inside the House, not only discuss matters but take part in deciding issues. I say, therefore, that communal representation is not a vicious thing, it is not a poison, it is the best arrangement that can be made for the safety and security of the different classes in this country. I do not call it a disfiguring of the constitution."[17] He called it decoration. Strongly defending the principle of communal representation even in the judiciary, he then raised his accusing finger and charged the existing judiciary with harbouring communal bias. He knew that his statement would evoke loud and angry protests, but he stuck to his guns and vindicated his judgement by saying, "Well, if my honourable friend can assure me that the existing judiciary is not without it communal bias, that, the Brahmin judge, when he sits to adjudicate upon issues between a Brahmin defendant and a Brahmin plaintiff, he decides as a mere judge I perhaps would be inclined to consider his proposition favourably. But I know what sort of judiciary we have. If my honourable friend and if this House had the patience, I could reel off heaps of stories where I know to my knowledge that the judiciary has abused and prostituted its position."[18]

It is necessary to bear this background in mind before asking: Why reservation? The answer is implicit in Dr. Ambedkar's *Who Were the Shudras*? and in *The Untouchables*. He reminds us again and again that the social organization of the Indo-Aryans was based on the theory of Chaturvarnya and that this theory means

stratification of society into four classes—brāhmaṇs, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras. In addition to stratifying society into four classes, the theory has gone further and made, as Dr. Ambedkar put it, "the principle of graded inequality the basis for determining the terms of associated life as between the four *varnas*." In the Preface to *Who Were the Shudras*? he has pointed out that the system of graded inequality is legal and penal, a system under which the śūdra is not only placed at the bottom of the gradation but is also subjected to innumerable ignominies and disabilities so as to prevent him from improving his lot or rising above the condition fixed for him by law. "Indeed until the fifth *Varna* of the Untouchables came into being," he states, "the *Shudras* were in the eyes of the Hindus the lowest of the low." A little further in the Preface he shows how the *varṇa* system has lightened its grip and it is still alive "notwithstanding there is no law to enforce it." He cites as evidence the present-day status of the śūdras and the untouchables in the Hindu society which, he adds, has remained just what it has been. Of the numerous new facts he has brought to light, the most important are summarized below.

The śūdras of the Indo-Aryan society in course of time became so degraded that they came to occupy a very low position in public life. This degradation was caused by the severity of the brāhmaṇical laws. Gradually the word 'śūdra' lost its original meaning of being the name of a particular community and became a general name for a low-class people bereft of civilization, culture, respect and position. This widening of the meaning brought in its train the widening of the application of the Code intended to deal with the original śūdras of the Indo-Aryan society. Thus have the so-called śūdras of the present-day become subject to the Code, though they are not śūdras in the original sense of the word. One is shocked to note the horrifying fact that the Code applicable to the original culprits has come to be applied to the innocents. The implication is that the Hindu law-givers had little historical sense, for they did not realize at all that the original śūdras were different from the present-day low-class people. It is due to their historical insensibility that this massacre of the innocents had taken place. The most unfortunate part of the tragedy is that the Code is applied to the present-day

śūdras in the same rigorous manner in which it was applied to the original śūdras.

Having stated these facts with his wonted clarity, Ambedkar strikes a personal note, which is both apologetic and confident. "I am ready to admit," he submits, "that I am not competent to speak even on Indian politics. If the warning is for the reason that I cannot claim mastery over the Sanskrit language, I admit this deficiency. But I do not see why it should disqualify me altogether from operating in this field. There is very little of literature in the Sanskrit language which is not available in English. The want of knowledge of Sanskrit need not therefore be a bar to my handling a theme such as the present. For I venture to say that a study of the relevant literature, albeit in English translations, for 15 years ought to be enough to invest even a person endowed with such moderate intelligence like myself, with sufficient degree of competence for the task. As to the exact measure of my competence to speak on the subject, this book will furnish the best testimony. It may well turn out that this attempt of mine is only an illustration of the proverbial fool rushing in where the angels fear to tread. But I take refuge in the belief that even the fool has a duty to perform, namely, to do his bit if the angel has gone to sleep or is unwilling to proclaim the truth. This is my justification for entering the prohibited field."[19] While doing his bit he has revealed that the śūdras were one of the Aryan communities of the Solar race, that at one time the Aryan society recognized only brāhmaṇs, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas, and not the śūdras whom it regarded as part of the kṣatriya *varṇa*, that in the continuous feud between the śūdra kings and the brāhmaṇs, the latter were subjected to many tyrannies and indignities, as a result of which the brāhmaṇs refused to perform the *upanayana* of the śūdras, and that owing to the denial of this rite, the śūdras who were kṣatriyas became socially degraded, fell below the rank of the vaiśyas and thus came to constitute the fourth *varṇa*. As for the reason which prompted him to write on the śūdras and pursue historical truth by the exposure of the so-called Sacred Books of the Hindus, he says that he wants the Hindus to realize that it is the doctrines contained in these books which are responsible for the decline and fall of their country and their society. Continuing, he adds that if the Hindus of this generation do not take

notice of what he has to say he is sure the future generation will. He does not despair of success, he claims. He recalls the words of Bhavabhuti in this context: "Time is infinite and earth is vast; some day there will be born a man who will appreciate what I have said." With considerable self confidence and righteous pride he then judges his book, saying, "Whatever that be the book is a challenge to orthodoxy."

At the same time he is aware of those among the Hindus who are likely to welcome the book. They are, he claims, those who believe in the necessity and urgency of social reform. Dr. Ambedkar blissfully acknowledges that such a class of Hindus exists, small though it is. These Hindus, he says with a touch of assurance in his tone, are his mainstay and it is to them that he had addressed his argument.

All this is followed by a moving apologia for his vilification of the sacred literature of the Hindus. "It will be said," he observes, "that I have shown no respect for the sacred literature of the Hindus which every sacred literature deserves. If the charge be true, I can plead two circumstances in justification of myself. Firstly, I claim that in my research I have been guided by the best tradition of the historian who treats all literature as vulgar—I am using the word in its original sense of belonging to the people—to be examined and tested by accepted rules of evidence without recognizing any distinction between the sacred and the profane and with the sole object of finding the truth. If in following this tradition I am found wanting in respect and reverence for the sacred literature of the Hindus my duty as a scholar must serve as my excuse. Secondly, respect and reverence for the sacred literature cannot be made to order. They are the results of social factors which make such sentiments natural in one case and quite unnatural in another."[20] There is considerable truth in Ambedkar's assertion that to a brāhmaṇ scholar reverence for the sacred literature of the Hindus is natural, but not so to a non-brāhmaṇ reader. It is natural for a brāhmaṇ scholar to treat his own sacred literature with uncritical reverence. "What is this sacred literature?" he asks. With the forthrightness of a judicious critic, he answers it in what seems to be a charming manner which may also be interpreted as the writer's artlessness, his naivete. It is a literature, he says tautologically, which is almost entirely the

creation of the brāhmaṇs, its whole object being to sustain the superiority and privileges of the brāhmaṇs. As he has a predilection for dialectics, he queries: "Why should not the Brahmins uphold the sanctity of such a literature?" He himself supplies the answer: "The very reason that leads the Brahmin to uphold it makes the non-Brahmin hate it." Then throwing off the mask of sweet temperedness and suavity, he suddenly explodes: "Knowing that what is called the sacred literature contains an abominable social philosophy which is responsible for their social degradation, the non-Brahmin reacts to it in a manner quite opposite to that of the Brahmin. That I sould be wanting in respect and reverence for the sacred literature of the Hindus should not surprise anyone if it is borne in mind that I am a non-Brahmin, not even a non-Brahmin but an Untouchable. My antipathy to the sacred literature could not naturally be less than that of the non-Brahmin. As Prof. Thorndyke says: that a man thinks is a biological fact, what he thinks is a sociological fact."[21] The reasons why the brāhmaṇ scholar is myopic and unable to be objective in his historical researches are obvious. In the first place, he looks upon sacred literature as the production of his forefathers and upon himself as duty-bound to defend it even at the cost of truth. Secondly, as this sacred literature supports his privileges, he is so painstaking in his defence of it and so unwilling to do anything which would undermine its authority. To this Dr. Ambedkar traces the absence *en bloc* of originality 'in the field of historical research by Brahmin scholars unless it be a matter of fixing dates or tracing genealogies'. Before closing his loaded, compendious Preface he lets the thunderbolt strike once again: "When one remembers that it is the *Shudras*, who have largely been instrumental in sustaining the infamamous system of *Chaturvarnya*, though it has been the primary cause of their degradation and that only the *Shudras* can destroy the *Chaturvarnya*, it would be easy to realize why I allowed the necessity of educating and thereby preparing the Shudra fully for such a sacred task to outweigh all other considerations which favoured the deletion or if not deletion the abridgement of the quotations."[22]

Most of the ideas stated briefly in the Preface are explained at considerable length in the book *Who Were the Shudras*?, the main thesis of which is that the śūdras were Aryans, that they

belonged to the kṣatriya class and that their degradation was due to the refusal of the brāhmaṇs to perform their *upanayana.* In Chapter X entitled 'The Degradation of the Shudras' Dr. Ambedkar describes in detail the interesting technique which brāhmaṇs employed to bring about this degradation from the rank of the second to that of the fourth *varṇa.* The four questions answered here are:

(*i*) Is the absence of *upanayana* the test of śūdradom?
(*ii*) Did the śūdra ever have the right to *upanayana*?
(*iii*) How can the loss of *upanayana* result in the general degradation of the śūdras?
(*iv*) What power did the brāhmaṇs have to deny *upanayana* to the śūdras?[23]

From the answers given by Dr. Ambedkar his position becomes plain. His acknowledged eminence as scholar adds weight to what he says, and what he says are not wild shots. He maintains that the absence of *upanayana* is indeed the test of śūdradom and that the śūdras did have the right to *upanayana,* though judicial pronouncements on the issue as to how to determine who is a kṣatriya and who is a śūdra are rather confusing. Dr. Ambedkar describes these pronouncements (which he has quoted at some length in this chapter) as 'a most confusing medley of opinion which settles little and unsettles much'. Surprisingly enough and to the bewilderment of all interested in this subject, the kāyasthas of Bengal are said to be śūdras. The Madras High Court considered all Mahrattas to be śūdras, but the Bombay High Court declared that the Mahrattas belonging to five families and ninety-six families were kṣatriyas and the rest śūdras. The Yadava Community to which Kṛṣṇa belonged was popularly believed to be a community of kṣatriyas, though according to the Madras High Court, the Yadavas were śūdras.

To determine whether a person is a śūdra or a kṣatriya there is, according to Dr. Ambedkar, only one sound criterion—the criterion of *upanayana.* When the kṣatriyas were excluded from *upanayana* by the hostile brāhmaṇs, it brought about their degradation. "Fortunately for me," he pleads, "it is not necessary for me to rely on logic alone, though I contend that logic is on my

side. For there is ample evidence both circumstantial as well as direct to show that both Shudras as well as women had at one time the right to wear the sacred thread."[24] What he shows next is that the ancient Aryan society regarded *upanayana* as essential for all, not excluding the deaf, the dumb, the idiot and even the impotent. He goes on to show further that *upanayana* was permitted in the case of Brahmaghnas, the Vratyas and even in the case of the Asvattha tree. On the basis of these facts systematically and logically developed, he arrives at the proposition that "it is difficult to believe that the women and Shudras were excluded from the Upanayana by the Aryan society from the very beginning. In this connection, attention may be drawn to custom prevalent among the Indo-Iranians who were very closely related to the Indo-Aryans in their culture and religion. Among the Indo-Iranians, not only both men and women but men and women of all classes are invested with the sacred thread. It is for the opponents to prove why the system was different among the Indo-Aryans."[25] With enough direct evidence available, Dr. Ambedkar does not find those agruments illogical which attempt to prove that there was a time when both women and śūdras had the right to *upanayana* and did have it performed. The Hindu religious books are quite explicit on this subject as they are also when they say that women not only learned the Vedas but they used to run schools for teaching the Vedas. "As to the Shudras," Dr. Ambedkar asserts, "the evidence is equally positive. If Sudas was a king, if Sudas was a Shudra, if his coronation ceremony was performed by Vasishtha and he performed the Rajasuya Yagya, then there can be no doubt that the Shudras did at one time wear the sacred thread. In addition to circumstantial evidence and the evidence of the authors mentioned before, the Sanskara Ganapati cited by Max Muller contains an express provision declaring the Shudras to be eligible for Upanayana."[26]

When the śūdras were denied the *upanayana*, the ceremony underwent a change in its significance which was spiritual at the outset; it now acquired a social significance. Dr. Ambedkar rightly believes that it was open to all, Aryans and non-Aryans alike, and had no social significance at all, for it was a common right of all and not a privilege of the few. Once the śūdras came to be deprived of it, its possession became a matter of honour

and its denial a badge of servility. From this Dr. Ambedkar draws the conclusion that the denial of *upanayana sanskara* to the śūdras introduced a new element in the Indo-Aryan society, forcing the śūdras to look up to the higher classes as their superiors and enabling the three higher classes to look down upon the śūdras as their inferiors. This, Dr. Ambedkar argues, is one way in which the loss of *upanayana* brought about the degradation of the śūdras. He does not forget to remind us of the implications of this loss. He points out, with considerable evidence to support him, that the right to property was dependent upon capacity to sacrifice, to perform yajñas. In other words, he adds, anyone who suffered from an incapacity to perform a sacrifice had no right to property. Capacity to sacrifice depended upon *upanayana*. This obviously meant that only those who were entitled to *upanayana* had a right to own property. Moreover, a person who had not studied the Vedas was not competent to perform the sacrifices. But the study of the Vedas was open only to those who had undergone the *upanayana* ceremony. If there was no *upanayana* the road to knowledge was closed. Expostulating against those who are likely to discount his thesis, he reminds them of the rules of the *Purva Mimansa* to show how the loss of *upanayana* could bring about the degradation of the śūdras. Once the relation of the *upanayana sanskara* to education and property is realized, he maintains, all difficulty in accepting the thesis that the degradation of the śūdras was entirely due to the less of *upanayana* would vanish. Concluding this section of Chapter X,[27] he remarks, "It will be seen, from what has been said above, how the sacrament of Upanayana was in the ancient Aryan society fundamental and how the social status and personal rights of persons depended upon it. Without Upanayana, a person was doomed to social degradation, to ignorance and to poverty. The stoppage of Upanayana was a most deadly weapon discovered by the Brahmins to avenge themselves against the Shudras. It had the effect of an atomic bomb. It did make the Shudra, to use the language of the Brahmins, a graveyard."[28]

In the seventh section of this Chapter he stresses that the brāhmaṇs alone could officiate at the *upanayana* ceremony and that there were some severe penalties which could be imposed upon the brāhmaṇ who performed unauthorised *upanayana*. He refers

to Manu and Parashara who in their Law Books mention many such penalties.

Some of Dr. Ambedkar's conclusions, however startling, may be stated as follow:

i. The śūdras were Aryans and kṣatriyas.

ii. To old scholars to whom the word 'śūdra' signified a servile and aboriginal class this new discovery must come as a surprize. The reason, according to Dr. Ambedkar is that the social organisation of the Vedic Aryans has yet to be studied.

iii. The degradation of the śūdras resulted from a violent conflict between them and the brāhmaṇs, of which there is abundant evidence. There is, Ambedkar maintains, direct evidence of a violent conflict between the śūdra king, Sudas, and the brāhmaṇ ṛṣi, Vasishtha. In order to bring out the nature of the conflict, he throws some important light on the relations between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra and in a passage full of erudite eloquence says: "In this dispute between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra, Sudas seems to have played an important part. Vasishtha was the family priest of Sudas. It was Vasishtha who performed his coronation ceremony. It was Vasishtha who helped him to win the battle against the ten kings. Notwithstanding this, Sudas removed Vasishtha from office. In his place he appointed Vishvamitra as his purohita who performed yajña for Sudas. This is the first deed of Sudas which created enmity between Sudas and Vasishtha. There was another deed which Sudas committed which widened and intensified the enmity. He threw into fire Shakti, the son of Vasishtha, and burned him alive. The story is reported in the Satyayana Brahmana."[29]

iv. The enmity between Sudas and Vasishtha appeared to have spread to their sons, a fact supported by the Taittiriya Samhita and confirmed by the Kaushitaki Brahmana. The Puranas record other conflicts also between kings and brāhmaṇs (e.g. Vena's conflict with brāhmaṇs as described in the Harivansa). The reason why the bearing of these cases on the position of the śūdras has not been realized as fully

as it should have been is that nobody has realized that this conflict was a conflict between the brāhmaṇs and śūdras. Dr. Ambedkar with his customary confidence declares that Sudas was definitely a śūdra and yet the composer of the hymns of the Ṛg Veda.

v. The book ends with a list of ten riddles of the śūdra, all of which need to be explained by the orthodox Hindu and the modern scholar, says Dr. Ambedkar.

No less amazingly novel are his theses on the origin of untouchability advanced in the book dealing with the subject. There are in all six propositions which sum up his views on untouchability:

i. There is no racial difference between the Hindus and the untouchables;

ii. The distinction between the Hindus and the untouchables in its original form, before the advent of untouchability, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien tribes. It is the Broken Men who subsequently came to be treated as untouchables;

iii. Just as untouchability has no racial basis so also has it no occupational basis;

iv. There are two roots from which untouchability has sprung:

(*a*) contempt and hatred of the Broken Men as of the Buddhists by the brāhmaṇs;

(*b*) continuation of beef-eating by the Broken Men after it had been given up by others.

v. In searching for the origin of untouchability care must be taken to distinguish the untouchables from the impure. All orthodox Hindu writers have identified the impure with the untouchables. This is an error. Untouchables are distinct from the impure.

vi. While the impure as a class came into existence at the time of the Dharma Sutras the untouchables came into being much later than 400 A.D.[30]

With this Dr. Ambedkar has completed his thesis on the origin of

untouchability and has parried no question one may ask in this regard. He boldly gives utterance to his views first on the question of untouchability among the non-Hindus and then on untouchability among the Hindus. He holds, not without reason, that besides the individual pollution the Hindus believe also in territorial and communal pollution. Equally significant and timely is his reminder that the notion of defilement prevalent among the Hindus is like the one which prevailed in primitive societies. In addition to territorial and communal pollution, the Hindus, he says, also believe in the hereditary untouchability of certain communities which are so vast in number that their list cannot be compiled by an individual with his unaided effort. Dr. Ambedkar, however, has given what he calls 'a very terrifying list' which includes 429 communities. Of outstanding importance to research scholars in his pronouncement that "Reduced to numbers it means that today there exist in India 40-60 millions of people whose mere touch causes pollution to the Hindus. Surely, the phenomenon of Untouchability among primitive and ancient society pales into insignificance before this phenomenon of hereditary Untouchability for so many millions of people which we find in India. This type of Untouchability among Hindus stands in a class by itself. It has no parallel in the history of the world. It is unparalleled not merely by reason of the colossal numbers involved which exceed the number of great many nations in Asia and in Europe but also on other grounds."[31] Still more valuable is his view that untouchability among the Hindus involves the isolation of a class—a class which, he points out, today numbers about 50-60 million people. Then, too, he shows the difference between the non-Hindus isolating the affected individuals and the Hindu society treating the untouchables. He takes particular objection to the Hindu society insisting on segregating the untouchables. The Hindu will not live in the quarters of the untouchables nor will allow the untouchables to live inside Hindu quarters. That untouchability among Hindus, he maintains, is a unique phenomenon is beyond question. Persons were indeed treated by non-Hindu communities as impure but only as individuals. Never was a whole class stigmatized as impure. Or again, he notes that the racial theory of untouchability both runs counter to the results of anthropometry and also finds very little sup-

port from such facts as are commonly known about the ethnology of India He regrets that the study of the totems and their distribution among different communities has been completely neglected by the students of sociology. This neglect, he continues, "is largely due to the current view propagated by the Census Commissioners that real unit of the Hindu social system and the basis of the fabric of Hindu society is the sub-caste founded on the rule of endogamy. Nothing can be a greater mistake than this. The unit of Hindu society is not the sub-caste but the family founded on the rule of exogamy. In this sense the Hindu family is fundamentally a tribal organization and not a social organization as the sub-caste is. The Hindu family is primarily guided in the matter of marriage by consideration of *Kul* and *Gotra* and only secondarily by considerations of caste and sub-caste. *Kul* and *Gotra* are Hindu equivalents of the totem of the Primitive Society. This shows that the Hindu society is still tribal in its organization with the family at its base observing the rules of exogamy based on *Kul* and *Gotra*. Castes and sub-castes are social oaganizations which are superimposed over the tribal organization and the rule of endogamy enjoined by them does not do away with the rule of exogamy enjoined by the tribal organizations of *Kul* and *Gotra*."[32]

RESERVATION

It must now be clear that Dr. Ambedkar sought reservation for, and special treatment of, the disparately disadvantaged human categories, partly by way of reaction against the privileges enjoyed by the caste Hindus for centuries, partly also under the inspiration of democratic influences. Being a Mahar himself, he knew his men as only an intelligent man of great sensitivity could. And he who is kicked, trampled on and tortured becomes much more sensitive than one born under a dancing star with a silver spoon in his mouth. Both sensitivity and intelligence, to mention only two of his great endowments, had made him realize why the śūdras and the untouchables were treated as they were and what steps could be taken to upgrade their status in society. His solution was what we call 'reservation' in politico-economic parlance.

He also knew, as all of us do, that the *sudra-panchama* sector

was in no manner inferior to the upper-class category. As a matter of fact the dalit sector "is a substantial portion of our populace and its latent capabilities in the field of science and art, generation of wealth and advance in other fields are a treasure of Bharat. To benumb the shudra masses and to deaden the depressed classes is a national disaster,"[33] Once the environmental inhibitions are removed, inhibitions which scotch their personality, their genius will flower. Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, on whose views this examination of the reservation issue is based, has cited a memorable extract which pleads for reservation with great force and pertinence. It shows that a child of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribe or other backward classes is not less qualified if he secures the qualifying 40 per cent or 50 per cent of the marks at a competitive examination, than the children of the upper classes who have all the advantages, who go to St. Paul's High School and St. Stephen's College, and who secure 70, 80 or even 90 per cent of the marks. Like a true Ambedkarian spokesman, Iyer has no hesitation at all in subscribing to the view that "a child who has been able to jump so many hurdles may be expected to do better and better as he progresses in life. If spring flower he cannot be, autumn flower he may be. Why, then, should he be stopped at the threshold of an alleged meritarian principle? The requirements of efficiency may always be safeguarded by the prescription of minimum standards. Mediocrity has always triumphed in the past in the case of the upper classes. But why should the so-called meritarian principle be put against mediocrity when we come to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward classes?"[34]

Some of the statements he has made, simple and straightforward as they are, are expressive of Dr. Ambedkar's own considered opinion:

i. "A process of redressing the social injustice of centuries by measures of compensatory group justice is thus a felt necessity of our times." The dehumanized dalit sector, subjected to social inequality and injustice for centuries on end must now be compensated by means of compensatory group justice for the injustice done to it. The upper-caste

people would thus atone for the centuries of maltreatment meted out to the oppressed classes.

ii. "This Operation Equalisation, Destination Equality is the theme of the Indian Odyssey vis-a-vis the deliverance of the backward classes. Reservations are but one of the major means towards effective equalisation and fundamental equity under our constitutional order." Reservations are regarded not as the only means to effective equalisation; it is one of the major means unavoidable if the effects of centuries of oppression and exploitation are to be undone and recompensatory measures are desired to be adopted. The underprivileged, the deprived and the exploited must be protected and nourished so that the big hiatus between them and the privileged may be bridged by processes like reservations and other concession in the field of public employment.

iii. Thus, the principle of social justice requires that all social primary goods— liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, etc.—are to be made available to all equally unless an unequal distribution is to the advantage of the un- or under-privileged. The principle of redress must not be divorced from the principle of social justice. Justice demands that inequalities must be compensated for and society treat more favourably those with fewer natural native assets and those born into less favourable families. Reservations are thus related to what is called the Redress Principle.

iv. In the words of Justice Iyer, "There is no doubt that the Scheduled Castes themselves are made up of many layers of castes, some higher, some lower, within the humble hierarchy. This becomes important because the lowest of the lowly, *the pariahs among the panchamas*, if one may say so, suffer more than the others, and one of the dynamic strategies to be innovated by socially sensitive policy-makers is as to how to prevent the benefits offered to the Scheduled Castes from being gobbled up by the higher layers leaving the lowliest always the lowliest. Some methodology whereby internal preference is given to the humblest among the Harijans is badly necessary so that the levelling

up may be felt where it is most needed. Often, the dynamic purpose of social habilitation through reservation of seats and posts misfires because the more muscular groups within the larger Harijan group lap up the cream. Therefore it may be on the agenda of action to provide as a policy a substantial fraction of the Harijan quota by way of sub-reservation to definable sections most *base-born, meanest in occupational status, direct in poverty.* Likewise, other things being equal, between two candidates from amongst the Scheduled Castes, *a scale of preference* may operate."[35]

v. The proponents of the reservation remedy—the reservationists—look upon it as a remedy calculated not to cure any individual disease but to correct group malady. "One Krishna cannot make Yadavas divine!" What is often missed is that the project deals not with individuals or specific persons but with backwards *en bloc.* Justice Iyer calls it '*collective* therapy'. Defining the reservationist objective, he maintains that it aims not at counting the number of fortunates in a desperately backward category but at upgrading the class labouring under dire disabilities in toto.

There is another dimension of the reservation therapy on which Justice Iyer has shed some revealing light. In one of his memorable passages he has drawn attention to the demoralizing effect of reservation in the matter of promotions from lower grade to the higher. The grievances of particular officers who are superseded by their Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe juniors can of course be appreciated, and viewed, as Justice Iyer puts it, from a narrow individualistic angle, these grievances may sound legitimate. But, says Iyer, "in this area of administrative policy, what is often overlooked is that the State is giving priority to *group Justice* as *against individual justice.* The State thus takes cognizance in this process of the centuries of exploitation to which the depressed group had been subjected. It is for this reason that it gives 'due group weightage and opportunities of escalation'. In the opinion of Justice Iyer the sooner the annual intake of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe is increased the speedier will the measure of group justice be. And by acceler-

ating massive influx of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe aspirants we may also hasten the closure of reservation. It should be borne in mind that the presence of these hands broadly established once the persistent reservationist demand can be silenced. It is now widely realized that the strategy of group justice should extend so wide as to include not only sweepers and scavengers but also to secretaries and judges and promotion cases. "Individual injustice is inevitable when any measure of group justice is implemented," postulates Justice Iyer and then asks in a meaningful tone, "Is there any cause without martyrs?"[36]

Notes

1. *W.S.*, Vol. 2. p. 42.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43, Dr. Ambedkar considered the question of weightage in his speech in the third meeting of the Indian Round Table Conference Sub-Committee No. III (Minorities) held on January 1, 1931 on the political representation of the Depressed Classes. He said: "In our opinion weightage is to be conceded because a minority is weak, either in numbers, or because its social standing is low or its educational standing is backward as compared with others, or because its economic strength is not sufficient to place it on fighting par with other communities." *Vide* K.L. Chanchreek & Saroj Prasad, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar* (Delhi, 1991), p. 99.
4. K.L. Chanchreek & Saroj Prasad, *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar* (New Delhi, 1991), p. 99.
5. *W.S.*, Vol. 2, p. 43.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15.
18. *Ibid.*. p. 115.
19. *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 11.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-62.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. Section VI, p. 172. See the interesting Appendix for more light on the importance of the sacrament of *upanayana* in the story of Shivaji related by Dr. Ambedkar in the eighth section of this Chapter.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
31. *Ibid.*, p., 265.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 303-05.
33. *I.D.F.*, p. 91.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

APPENDIX I

Navdhammasuttas

The Brahmins have not been very steadfast in their belief regarding the sacred character of what they called their books of religion. They fought to maintain the thesis that the Vedas were not only sacred but that they were infallible. Not only they maintained that the Vedas were infallible but they spent their ingenuity to invent strange arguments to support the doctrine of infallibility. Yet they had not the slightest compunction to overthrow the position of the Vedas and to subordinate them first to the Smritis, then to the Puranas and lastly to the Tantras. The question of all questions is what made the Brahmins degrade the Vedas and supersede them by Smritis, Puranas and the Tantras if they regarded their Vedas as the most sacred? [IV. 60-61]

As to philosophy there is nothing of it in the Rig-Veda. As Prof. Wilson observes there is in the Rig-Veda, which is the stock Veda, scarcely any indication of doctrinal of philosophical speculation, no allusion to the later notions of the several schools, nor is there any hint of metempsychosis, or of the doctrine intimately allied to it, of the repeated renovation of the world. The Vedas may be useful as a source of information regarding the social life of the Aryans. As a picture of primitive life it is full of curiosity but there is nothing elevating. There are more vices and a few virtues. [IV. 44]

The Brahmanic literature gives us no clue whatsoever as to why the Brahmins abandoned the worship of Agni, Indra, Surya and Brahma. There is some explanation as to why the cult to Brahma disappeared. It rests in a charge which is found to be levelled in the Brahmanic literature against Brahma. The charge is that he committed rape on his own daughter and hereby made himself unworthy of worship and devotion. [IV. 85]

While there is something to speculate about the abandonment of Brahma there is nothing to account for the abandonment of the others. The disappearance of Agni, Indra, Surya and Brahma is thus a mystery. This is no place to solve this mystery. It is enough to say that the *Gods* of the Hindus had ceased to be Gods—a terrible thing. [*Ibid.*]

The second question is also enveloped in mystery. Brahmanic literature, to account for the importance of the cults of these new Gods, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva and Rama, is full and overflowing. But there is nothing in the Brahmanic literature to account for the rise of these new Gods. Why these new Gods were brought into action is thus a mystery. The mystery however deepens when one finds that some of the new Gods were definitely anti-Vedic. [*Ibid.*]

Brahma and Vishnu had *Sakti* which in conformity with the theory must have dwelt in their wives. Why then did *Sarasvati* and *Lakshmi* not take part in the battle with the Asuras? This part is only reserved for the wives of Shiva. Even here Parvati's role is quite different from that of Durga. Parvati is represented as a simple woman. She has no heroic deeds to her credit like the ones claimed for Durga. Like Durga, Parvati is also the Sakti of Shiva. Why was Shiva's Sakti dwelling in Parvati so dull, so dormant, and so inactive as to be non-existent? [IV. 106]

Looking as it purely from the point of view of logic if every God has *Sakti* then even the vedic Gods must have had it. Why then was this doctrine not applied to the wives of the Vedic Gods? Looking at it from the point of view of history, there is no justification for saying that the Puranic Gods had *Sakti* in them. [*Ibid.*]

How can such cowardly Gods have any prowess? If they had none, how can they give it to their wives. To say that Goddesses must be worshipped because they have Sakti is not merely a riddle but an absurdity. It requires explanation why this doctrine of Sakti was invented. Was it to put it a new commodity on the market that the Brahmins started the worship of the Goddesses and degraded the Gods? [IV. 107]

These explanations are like effusions of the imbeciles. They show how hard the Brahmins were put to for the defence of the Varna system. The question is why were the Brahmins not able

to give a consistent and uniform unimpeachable, convincing and rational explanation of the Varna system of which they have been such strong protagonists? [IV. 250]

The responsibility of the Hindus is much greater because there is no plausible explanation he can offer in justification of untouchability. He cannot say that the Untouchable is a leper or a mortal wretch who must be shunned. He cannot say that between him and the Untouchables, there is a gulf due to religious antagonism which is not possible to bridge. Nor can he plead that it is the Untouchable who does not wish to assimilate with the Hindus. [V. 5]

The Hindu treats the Untouchables as being born to serve the Hindu community. It being his duty to serve, the Untouchables cannot refuse to serve the Hindu whenever the latter call upon to do so. The Hindus of the village hold the belief that they can commandeer the labour of the Untouchables. The system is known as '*Begar*', or forced labour. [V. 55]

Lala Lajpatrai, if he had cared to investigate could have found that the cruelties and atrocities practised by the Hindus against the Untouchables were no less than those practised by the Americans upon the Negroes. If these atrocities are not so well known to the world as are those practised upon the Negro, it is not because they do not exist. They are not known because there is no Hindu who will not do his best to conceal truth in order to hide the shame. [V. 57]

As has already been pointed out, the Hindu social order is based on the principle of graded inequality. It may not be an exaggeration to say that not many people understand the significance of this principle. The social system based on inequality stands on a different footing from a social system based on graded inequality. The former is a weak system which is not capable of self-preservation. The latter on the other hand, is capable of self-preservation. In a social system based on inequality, the low orders can combine to overthrow the system. None of them have any interest to preserve it. In a social system based on graded inequality the possibility of a general common attack by the aggrieved parties is non-existent. In a system of graded inequality, the aggrieved parties are not on a common level. This can happen only when they are only high and low. In

the system of graded inequality there are the highest (the Brahmins). Below the highest are the higher (the Kshtriyas). Below the higher are those who are high (Vaishya). Below the high are the low (Shudra) and below the low are those who are lower (the Untouchables). [V. 101]

The laws of the Hindu Social Order are as repulsive to Class II, the Shudras as they are to Class IV, the Untouchables. It is interesting to know the status of the Shudras in the Hindu society as prescribed by Manu the Law-giver and the Architect of Hindu society. [V. 113]

This struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables constituted undoubtedly the main episode. But within this episode there was another which, though of a smaller character, was yet full of significance. It was the struggle between the Backward Classes and the Untouchables. The representatives of the Backward Classes contended that the category known as Depressed Classes should not only include Untouchables in the strict sense of that term but should also include those classes which are economically and educationally backward. The object of those that wanted, that not only the Untouchables but also those who are educationally and economically backward shall also be given separate representation, was a laudable one. In putting forth this contention they were not asking for anything that was new. Under the reformed constitution that came into operation in 1920, the right of the economically and educationally backward communities was recognized in the two provinces of India namely Bombay and Madras. In Bombay the Marathas and allied castes and in Madras the Non-Brahmins were given separate representation on the only ground that they were economically and educationally backward. It was feared that if special representation was not given to those communities, they would be politically suppressed by the minority of high caste Hindus such as Brahmins and allied castes. There are many communities in other Provinces who are in the same position and who need social political representation to prevent their being suppressed by the higher castes. It was therefore perfectly proper for the representatives of the Backward Classes from the Hindus to have claimed special representation for themselves. If

their point of view had been accepted the total number of Depressed Classes would have swelled to enormous proportions. But they received no support either from the Untouchables or from the high caste Hindus. The Hindus were opposed to the move which was calculated to increase the population of the Depressed Classes. The Untouchables did not want to be included in their category any class of people who were not really Untouchables. The proper course for these backward communities was to have asked to make a division of Touchable Hindus into advanced and backward and to have claimed separate representation for the Backward. In that effort the Untouchables would have supported them. But they did not agree to this and persisted in being included among the Depressed Classes largely because they thought that this was easier way of securing their object. But as the Untouchables opposed this the backward communities turned and joined the Hindus in denying the existence of Untouchables, more vehemently than the Hindus. [V. 243-44]

The Untouchables simply detest the name Harijan. Various grounds of objection are urged against the name. In the first place it has not bettered their position. It has not elevated them in the eyes of the Hindus. The new name has become completely identified with the subject matter of the old. Everybody knows that Harijans are simply no other than the old Untouchables. The new name provides no escape to the Untouchables from the curse of untouchability. With the new name they are damned as much as they were with the old. Secondly the Untouchables say that they prefer to be called Untouchables. They argue that it is better that the wrong should be called by its known name. [V. 363]

I am not staggered by Pakistan; I am not indignant about it; nor do I believe that it can be smashed by shooting into it similes and metaphors. Those who believe in shooting it by similes should remember that nonsense does not cease to be nonsense because it is put in rhyme, and that a metaphor is no argument though it be sometimes the gunpower to drive one home and imbed it in memory. I believe that it would be neither wise nor possible to reject summarily a scheme if it has behind it the sentiment, if not the passionate support, of 90 p.c. Muslims

of India. I have no doubt that the only proper attitude to Pakistan is to study it in all aspects, to understand its implications and to form an intelligent judgement about it. [VIII. 7-8]

The pity of it is that the two communities can never forget or obliterate their past. Their past is imbedded in their religion, and for each to give up its past is to give up its religion. To hope for this is to hope in vain. [VIII. 37]

The cementing force of a common religion is wanting. From a spiritual point of view, Hindus and Musalmans are not merely two classes or two sects such as Protestants and Catholics or Shaivas and Vaishnavas. They are two distinct species. In this view, neither the Hindu nor the Muslim can be expected to recognize that humanity is an essential quality present in them both, and that they are not many but one and that the differences between them are no more than accidents. For them Divinity is divided and with the division of Divinity their humanity is divided and with the division of humanity they must remain divided. There is nothing to bring them in one bosom. [VIII. 193]

The physical and intellectual effects of *Purdah* are nothing as compared with its effects on morals. The origin of *Purdah* lies of course in the deep-rooted suspicion of sexual appetites in both sexes and the purpose is to check them by segregating the sexes. But far from achieving the purpose, *Purdah* has adversely affected the morals of Muslim men. Owing to *Purdah* a Muslim has no contact with any woman outside those who belong to his own household. Even with them his contact extends only to occasional conversation. For a male there is no company of and no commingling with the females except those who are children or aged. This isolation of the males from females is sure to produce bad effects on the morals of men. It requires no psychoanalyst to say that a social system which cuts off all contact between the two sexes produces an unhealthy tendency towards sexual excesses and unnatural and other morbid habits and ways. [VIII. 231]

There is thus a stagnation not only in the social life but also in the political life of the Muslim community of India. The Muslims have no interest in politics as such. Their predominant interest is religion. This can be easily seen by the terms and conditions that

a Muslim constituency makes for its support to a candidate fighting for a seat. The Muslim constituency does not care to examine the programme of the candidate. All that the constituency wants from the candidate is that he should agree to replace the old lamps of the masjid by supplying new ones at his cost, to provide a new carpet for the masjid because the old one is torn, or to repair the masjid because it has become dilapidated. In some places a Muslim constituency is quite satisfied if the candidate agrees to give a sumptuous feast and in other if he agrees to buy votes for so much a piece. With the Muslims, election is a mere matter of money and is very seldom a matter of social programme of general improvement. [VIII. 232]

On reading these Brahmanic speculations on the origin of the four *Varnas* and particularly of the Shudras one is very much reminded of these words of Prof. Max Muller. All these speculations are really the twaddles of idiots and ravings of madmen and as such they are of no use to the student of history who is in search of a natural explanation of a human problem. [VII. 41]

Anyone who reads this summary will be struck by two considerations. He will be struck by the consideration that Shudra alone has been selected by the Brahmanic law-givers as a victim for their law making authority. The wonder must be all the greater when it is recalled that in the ancient Brahmanic literature the oppressed class in the ancient Indo-Aryan society was the Vaishya and not the Shudra. In this connection a reference may be made to the *Aitareya Brahmana*. The *Aitareya Brahmana* is telling the story of King Vishvantara and the Shyaparna Brahmanas refers to the sacrificial drink to which the different classes are entitled. [VII. 56]

He will also be struck by the close connection of the disabilities of the Shudra with the privileges of the Brahmin. The Shudra is below the Traivarnikas and is contrasted with the Traivarnikas. That being so, one would expect all the Traivarnikas to have the same rights against the Shudras. But what are the facts? The facts are that the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas have no rights worth speaking of against the Shudras. The only Traivarnika who has special rights and privileges is the Brahmin. For instance, if the Shudra is guilty of an offence against the Brahmin, the Brahmin has the privilege of demanding a higher punishment than what a Ksha-

triya or a Vaishya could. A Brahmin could take the property of the Shudra without being guilty of an offence if he needed it for the purpose of performing a sacrifice. A Shudra should not accumulate property because he thereby hurts the Brahmin. A Brahmin should not live in a country where the king is a Shudra. Why is this so? Had the Brahmin any cause to regard the Shudra as his special enemy? [VII. 56-57]

What does the average Brahmin think of these disabilities of the Shudras? That they are extraordinary in their conception and shameful in their nature will be admitted by all. Will the Brahmin admit it? It would not be unnatural if this catalogue of disabilities may not make any impression upon him. In the first place, by long habit and usage his moral sense has become so dulled that he has ceased to bother about the how and why of these disabilities of the Shudras. In the second place, those of them who are conscious of them feel that similar disabilities have been imposed on particular classes in other countries and there is therefore nothing extraordinary shameful in the disabilities of the Shudras. It is the second attitude that needs to be exposed. [VII. 57]

The Aryan race theory is so absurd that it ought to have been dead long ago. But far from being dead, the theory has a considerable hold upon the people. There are two explanations which account for this phenomenon. The first explanation is to be found in the support which the theory receives from Brahmin scholars. This is a very strange phenomenon. As Hindus, they should ordinarily show a dislike for the Aryan theory with its express avowal of the superiority of the European races over the Asiatic races. But the Brahmin scholar has not only no such aversion but he most willingly hails it. The reasons are obvious. The Brahmin believes in the two-nation theory. He claims to be the representative of the Aryan race and he regards the rest of the Hindus as descendants of the non-Aryans. The theory helps him to establish his kinship with the European races and share their arrogance and their superiority. He likes particularly that part of the theory which makes the Aryan an invader and a conqueror of the non-Aryan native races. For it helps him to maintain and justify his overlordship over the non-Brahmins. [VII. 80]

APPENDIX II

On Shivaji's Upanayana

(A story told by Ambedkar)

As is well known, Shivaji after having established a Hindu independent kingdom in the western part of Maharashtra thought of proclaiming himself a king by having his coronation performed. It was felt by Shivaji and his friends that the coronation ceremony if it was at all to be of any value must be performed according to Vedic rites. But in carrying out his wishes Shivaji found himself faced with many difficulties. He found that whether his coronation could be performed with Vedic rites depended entirely upon the Brahmins. Nobody was from religious point of view qualified to perform the ceremony except a Brahmin. Secondly, he found that no such ceremony could be performed unless it was proved that he was a Kshatriya. There was a third difficulty, namely, that even if he was found to be a Kshatriya, he was past the age of Upanayana and without Upanayana there could be no coronation. The third difficulty was a minor one for it could be got over by the performance of the Vratya Stoma ceremony. The first difficulty was the greatest stumbling block. It related to Shivaji's status. The question was, was he a Kshatriya? If that could be got over, the rest was easy. Shivaji's claim that he was Kshatriya was opposed by many. His principal opponents were Brahmins who were led by his own Prime Minister Moro Pant Pingle. Unfortunately for Shivaji even his Maratha Sardars had refused to give him social precedence and had ranged themselves against him. In their view, he was a Shudra. Shivaji's claim was also in direct conflict with the well established thesis long insisted upon by the Brahmins that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age. Shivaji was living in the Kali age. Obviously he could not be a Kshatriya. This objection to his claim for the status of Ksha-

triya was further strengthened by the non-performance of the ceremony of Upanayana or the investiture of the sacred thread at the proper time, which was fixed by the Sastras to be the eleventh year in the case of the Kshatriyas. This was taken to be evidence of his being a Shudra. He was however fortunate in securing the services of one Gagabhat, a renowned Brahmin, resident of Benares, learned both in the Vedas and Sastras. Gagabhat solved all difficulties and performed Shivaji's coronation on 6th June 1674 at Raigad first after performing the Vratya Stoma and then the Upanayana.

Shivaji's case is important for several reasons. It is important because it proves that nobody except a Brahmin has the right to perform the Upanayana and that nobody can compel a Brahmin to perform it if he is not prepared to do so. Shivaji was the ruler of an independent kingdom and had already started styling himself Maharaja and Chhatrapati. There were many Brahmins who were his subjects. Yet, Shivaji could not compel anyone of them to perform his coronation.

It is important because it proves that the ceremony to be valid must be performed by a Brahmin. A ceremony performed by a non-Brahmin would be infructuous. It was open to Shivaji to have his coronation performed by a non-Brahmin. But he did not dare to do it. For he knew it would be without any social or spiritual efficacy.

In the third place, it is important because it proves that the power of determining the status of a Hindu depends entirely upon the will of the Brahmins. The decision in favour of Shivaji is sought to be justified by the genealogy which was brought from Mewar by Shivaji's friend, Balaji Avaji, and which connected Shivaji with the Sisodiyas of Mewar who were reckoned as Kshatriyas. It has been alleged that the genealogy was a fabrication got up for the occasion. Assuming it was not a fabrication, how can it justify the recognition of Shivaji's claim to be a Kshatriya? Far from establishing that Shivaji was a Kshatriya, the genealogy could do no more than raise another question, namely, whether the Sisodiyas were Kshatriyas. The Sisodiyas were Rajputs. There is considerable doubt as to whether the Rajputs are the descendants of the original Kshatriyas who formed the second Varna of the ancient Indo-Aryan community. One view is that

they are foreigners, remnants of the Huns who invaded India and established themselves in Rajputana and whom the Brahmins raised to the status of Kshatriyas with the object of using them as means to suppress Buddhism in Central India by a special ceremony before the sacred fire and who were therefore known as the Agnikul Kshatriyas. This view has the support of many erudite scholars who are entitled to speak on the subject. Vincent Smith says:[1]

> In this place I want to draw attention to the fact, long suspected and now established by good evidence that the foreign immigrants into Rajputana and the upper Gangetic valley were not utterly destroyed in the course of their wars with the native Princes. Many of course perished but many survived and were mixed in the general population of which no inconsiderable part is formed by their descendants. These foreigners like their fore-runners the Sakas and the Yue-chi universally yielded to the wonderful assimilative power of Hinduism and rapidly became Hinduised. Clans or families which succeeded in winning chieftainships were admitted readily into the frame of Hindu polity as Kshatriyas or Rajputs and there is no doubt that the Parihars and many other famous Rajput clans of the north were developed out of the barbarian hordes which poured into India during the fifth and sixth centuries. The rank and file of the strangers became Gujars and the castes ranking lower than Rajputs in their precedence. Further to the south, various indigenous or aboriginal tribes and clans underwent the same process of Hinduised social promotion in virtue of which Gonds, Bhars, Kharwas and so forth emerged as Chandels, Rathors, Gaharwars and other well-known Rajput clans duly equipped with pedigree reaching back to the sun and the moon.

William Crooke says:[2]

> Recent research has thrown much light on the origin of Rajputs. A wide gulf lies between the Vedic Kshatriyas and the Rajputs of mediaeval times which it is now impossible to bridge. It is now certain that the origin of many clans dates

from the Saka or Kushan invasions of more certainly from that of the White Huns who destroyed the Gupta empire about 480 A.D. The Gujar tribe connected with the latter people adopted Hinduism and their leaders formed the main stock from which the higher Rajput families sprang. When these new claimants to princely honour accepted the faith and the institution of Brahmanism the attempt would naturally be made to connect them with the heroes of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Hence arose the body of legend recorded in these annals by which a fabulous origin from the sun and the moon was ascribed to these Rajput families... The group denoted by the name Kshatriya or Rajput depended on status rather than on descent and it was therefore possible for foreigners to be introduced into these tribes without and violation of the prejudices of caste, which was then only partially developed. But it was necessary to disguise this admission of foreigners under a convenient fiction. Hence arose the legend how by a solemn act of purification or initiation under the superintendence of the ancient Vedic Rishis, the *fire-born* septs were created to help the Brahmins in repressing Buddhism and other heresies. This privilege was confined to four steps known as Agnikula or fire-born viz., the Parmar, Parihar, Chalukya and Chauhan.

Dr. D.R. Bhandarkar also holds the same view. According to him, the Rajaputs are the descendants of Gujars, the Gujars were foreigners and that the Rajputs are therefore the descendants of foreigners.

The Brahmins engaged for the coronation could not have been ignorant of the origin of the Rajputs, and their claim to be descended from the Kshatriyas. But assuming that they did not know this fact they knew that there was already a previous decision of the Brahmins, namely, that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age. This was an old, long-standing decision. And if the Brahmins had respect for precedent, they were bound to throw out the claim of Sisodiyas as well as of Shivaji. Nobody would have blamed them, if they had done so. But the Brahmins had never accepted the law of precedent as binding upon them. With them there was no such thing as *stare decisis*.

Fourthly, it is important because it shows that the decisions of the Brahmins on matters of status were open to sale like the indulgences of the Catholic clergy. That the decision of Gagabhat was not an honest decision is obvious from the amount of money which Gagabhat and other Brahmins received as officiating priests. The amount of money spent on the coronation by Shivaji and how much of it went to Gagabhat and the Brahmins will be seen from the following details collected by Mr. Vaidya:[3]

> These ministers were presented each with one lakh of hon, one elephant, one horse, garments and ornaments. Gagabhat was given one lakh of rupees for seeing the whole ceremony through. The Dakshinas granted by Shivaji on the several occasions of the coronation ceremony were very large, as was suited to the occasion. Sabhasad reports that the whole expenditure amounted to one crore and forty-two lakhs of hons or 426 lakhs of rupees.
>
> Sabhasad relates that 50,000 Vaidika Brahmins had collected on the occasion of Shivaji's coronation. Besides these there were Jogis, Sannyasis, etc., by thousands. These were fed or given corn below the fort. It is related in contemporary papers that Shivaji, before coronation, was weighed against gold and almost every other metal as well as auspicious thing. Dutch record describing the ceremony in detail on 3rd October PS. 1684 states that Shivaji weighed 17,000 hons or 160 lbs. and he was also weighed against silver, copper, iron, etc., and against camphor, salt, sugar, butter, various kinds of fruit, betel-nuts, etc., and the value of the whole was distributed amongst Brahmins. On the 7th June, the day after the coronation, Dakshina was given in general and every Brahmin got three to five rupees and everyone else, whether woman or child, two rupees and one rupee. In all, the Dakshina amounted to one and a half lakhs of hon[4] in value.
>
> Oxenden also states in his diary from 18th May to 13th June that Shivaji was weighed against gold and the weight 16,000 hons, together with one lakh of hons in addition, were distributed as Dakshinas among Brahmans.
>
> The above noted Dutch record further states that for the Vratya ceremony 7,000 hons were given to Gagabhat and

> 17,000 to other Brahmins. On the 5th of June Shivaji bathed in holy Ganges water and every Brahmin present was given 100 hons.

Can the amount paid to Gagabhat be taken as representing nothing more than a fee properly payable to a priest? There is one circumstance which may be depended upon to show that Gagabhat was not even paid enough. It is that what Gagabhat got was comparatively much less than what the Ministers of Shivaji got. Two facts must however be noted as telling on the other side before any conclusion is drawn from this fact. They completely nullify the argument. The first is that the ministers themselves had made large presents to Shivaji on his coronation. Moropant Pingle the Peshwa or Prime Minister of Shivaji, the Mujamdar had paid 7,000 hons and the other two ministers 5,000 hons each. Deducting these, the presents given to them by Shivaji must be said to be much smaller than they appear to be.

The second fact is that these ministers of Shivaji were the greatest opponents of Shivaji in this project of coronation. They were staunch in their view that he was a Shudra and that he was not entitled to have his coronation performed as it was a right which belonged to the Kshatriya only. It is, therefore, no surprise if Shivaji gave them large presents with a view to silence them and win them over permanently to his side. The amount of money paid to the ministers by Shivaji is therefore no criterion to determine whether the amount paid to Gagabhat was no more than a fair fee for officiation. Indeed there are so many twists and turns taken by Gagabhat that one is forced to the conclusion that it was more than fair fee and that it included some part as illegal gratification to keep him straight.

In this business of coronation the man who took the most leading part in bringing it about was a Kayastha from Maharashtra by name Balaji Avaji who was the Personal Secretary to Shivaji. The first step Balaji took was to send three Brahmins[5] as messengers from Shivaji to fetch Gagabhat from Benares with full information as to the status and purpose of Shivaji. What did Gagabhat do? He sent back the three messengers with a letter resusing to accept the invitation on the ground that in his view Shivaji was a Shudra and was therefore not fit for coronation.

The next step Balaji took was to collect evidence in support of Shivaji's claim to the status of a Kshatriya. He succeeded in obtaining a genealogy which showed that Shivaji was a Kshatriya descended from the Sisodiyas who were Rajputs and rulers of Mewad. This evidence he sent with another messenger to Gagabhat. Gagabhat seemed to have been impressed by the evidence for he agreed to come to Raigad to perform the coronation ceremony. What did Gagabhat do on his arrival? He said that he had reexamined the evidence and had come to the conclusion that Shivaji was a Shudra and was therefore unfit for coronation.

This is not the only somersault which Gagabhat took in this business. He took another and a very queer turn and declared that he was prepared to perform the coronation of Balaji Avaji for he was a Kayastha and therefore a Kshatriya but not of Shivaj who was a Shudra. Gagabhat did not stop there. He again turned round and gave his opinion that Shivaji was a Kshatriya and that he was prepared to perform his coronation and even went so far as to write a treatise known as Gagabhatti in which he sought to prove that the Kayasthas were bastards.

What do these twists and turns show? Do they not show he was a most unwilling priest and that his willingness has had to be bought by cash? If this argument is sound then there is no doubt that his decision that Shivaji was Kshatriya was sold by him for illegal gratification.

Lastly, Shivaji's case is important because it shows that the Brahmins in the matter of status did not recognize as being bound by the principle of *res judicata*. They regard themselves as free to reopen a case already decided by them. For how long did the Brahmins respect their decision that Shivaji was a Kshatriya?

Shivaji started a new era from the day of his coronation, namely, 6th June 1674 which he called the Rajyabhisheka Era. How long did it remain in vogue? Only so long as Shivaji and his descendants remained as active rulers on the throne. The moment effective sovereignty passed into the hands of the Brahmin Peshwas, they issued an order[6] to discontinue it. Not only did they stop the use of the Era, they began using the style of the Muslim Emperors, namely, the Fasli year. The Brahmins did not stop there. They went further and began to question the very status of Shivaji's descendants as Kshatriyas.[7] They could do nothing to

the two sons of Shivaji, Sambhaji and Rajaram. Shivaji had their Upanayana performed in his life-time by Brahmins with Vedic rites. They could do nothing to his grandson, Shahu, because the Brahmins had no ruling power in their hands. The moment Shahu transferred his sovereign powers to his Brahmin Peshwa their road to repudiation became clear. There is no evidence whether Ramjee Raje the successor and adopted son of Shahu, who was minor and whose guardians were the Peshwas, had his Upanayana performed and if so, whether it was performed with Vedic rites. But there is definite evidence that the Upanayana ceremony of his successors, Shahu II, who was adopted in 1777 had been performed with *Pauranic* rites and by the direction of the Peshwas.[8] The performance of Upanayana of Shahu II with *Pauranic* rites was tantamount to his being regarded by the Peshwa as a Shudra. For it is only in the case of a Shudra that the ceremonies are performed with *Pauranic* rites. What happened to Maharaja Pratapsing who succeeded Shahu II in 1808 whether or not his Upanayana was performed and if performed whether it was performed with Vedic rites or *Pauranic* rites it is not possible to be definite. One thing, however, is definitely known that in about 1827 the Shankaracharya of Karvir in his judgement about the status of the Kayasthas of Sangli stated[9] "that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age and that documents showing that neither Shivaji, nor Sambhaji nor Shahu were Kshatriyas exist in his Daftar". It is alleged that this statement is not to be found in the original judgement but was interpolated by the Brahmin Raja of Sangli. Be that as it may, it was a direct challenge to the status of Pratapsinha as a descent of Shivaji. Pratapsinha had to put the issue to a conference of Brahmins which was held in Satara in 1830. The majority gave a decision in favour and saved Pratapsinha from being degraded to the status of a Shudra.

Foiled in their attempt to level down one line of Shivaji to the status of a Shudra, the Brahmins began their attack on the status of the second line of Shivaji which had established itself at Kolhapur. In the reign of one of the rulers of Kolhapur by name Babasaheb Maharaj, the Palace Priest by name Raghunath Sastri Parvate took into his head to perform all ceremonies in the Palace with *Pauranic* rites. It is said that he was stopped from continuing the practice. Babasaheb died in 1886. From 1886 to 1894, all rulers were minors and the administration was in the hands of

the British. There is no direct evidence as to the exact manner and mode of ceremonial performances adopted by the Palace priest. In 1902, the late Shahu Maharaj issued order to the Palace priest to perform all ceremonies in the Vedic manner. The priest refused and insisted on performing it in the *Pauranic* manner suggesting thereby that the rulers of Kolhapur were Shudras and not Kshatriyas. The part played by Sankaracharya of Karvir Math in this affair is very noteworthy. At the time of the controversy the head of the Math called Guru, had adopted a disciple (Sishya) by name Brahmanalkar and had given him all the rights of the head of the Math. At first both the Guru and the Sishya were on the side of the Palace Priest and against the Maharaja. Later on, the disciple took the side of the Maharaja and accepted his status as a Kshatriya. The Guru who remained on the side of the Priest excommunicated the Sishya. The Maharaja later on tried to create his own Sankaracharya[10] but he too proved false to the Maharaja.

Shivaji was recognised as a Kshatriya. Obviously, that status was not a personal honour conferred on him. It was a status in tail and belonged to his family as well as to his descendants. Nobody could question it. It could be lost by a particular descendant by doing some act which was inconsistent with it. It could not be lost generally. No act inconsistent with the Kshatriya status was attributed to any of the descendants of Shivaji. Yet the Brahmins came forward to repudiate the decision on their status.

This could happen only because the Brahmins claimed the power to do and undo the status of any Hindu at any time. They can raise a Shudra to the status of a Kshatriya. They can degrade the Kshatriya to the status of a Shudra. Shivaji's case proves that their sovereignty in this matter is without limit and without challenge.

These instances are no doubt drawn from the Bombay Presidency only. But the principles from them are clear and general in their application. They are:

(1) That the Brahmins have the exclusive right to perform the Upanayana. Neither Shivaji, nor Pratap Sinha nor the Kayasthas, Panchals or Palashes wanted the Upanayana to be performed by a non-Brahmin. It is only once

that the Kayasthas resolved to have their ceremonies performed by Kayasthas. But it was only a paper resolution.

(2) The Brahmin has the right to say whose Upanayana he will perform and whose he will not perform. In other words, the Brahmin is the sole judge of deciding whether a given community is entitled to Upanayana.

(3) The support of the Brahmins for the performance of Upanayana need not be based on honest grounds. It could be purchased by money. Shivaji got the support of the Brahmin Gagabhat on payment of money.

(4) The denial of Upanayana by the Brahmins need not be on legal or religious ground. It is possible for the denial to be based on purely political grounds. The refusal by the Brahmins of Upanayana to Kayasthas was entirely due to political rivalry between the two.

(5) The right of appeal against the denial of an Upanayana by a Brahmin is only to a Vidvat-Parishad and the Vidvat-Parishad is an assembly for which a Brahmin alone is eligible to be a member.

From the foregoing discussion, it must be clear to all that the Brahmins did possess the power to deny Upanayana. Given the powers and the motive, there is nothing strange if they used it against the Shudras.

Notes

1. Quoted by C.V. Vaidya in his *History of Mediaeval India*, Vol. II, p. 8.
2. Quoted by Vaidya, *ibid.*, p. 9.
3. *Shivaji, the Founder of Maratha Swaraj*, pp. 248 and 252.
4. A Hon was equal to 3 rupees.
5. They were (1) Keshav Bhat, (2) Bhalachandra Bhat, and (3) Somanath Bhat.
6. Sardesai, *Marathi Riyasat*, II, p. 363, and Vaidya, *Shivaji*, p. 251.
7. What follows is taken from *Siddhanta Vijaya*, edited by Rao Bahadur Dongre.
8. Dongre Siddhanta Vijaya, Introduction, p. 6.
9. Dongre, *Ibid.*, Introduction. p. 9.
10. He is known as Dr. Kurtakoti.

APPENDIX III

Myth Lies Shattered

In an article 'Myth Lies Shattered' on Los Angeles riots Vasantha R. Patri examines some of the psycho-social causes of discrimination and ethnic prejudice. Though this article has nothing to do with the Hindu caste stratification, what the author says about the blacks, chicanos, and native Americans, communities largely confined to the fringes of American society and constituting some of the most disadvantaged minorities in the USA, is relevant to our study of the treatment which the despised social groups in India have been receiving at the hands of the privileged upper-caste men.

Historically, the slave trade brought the black race into America in 1619. They were then defined as property and denied civil rights. The slave owners demanded absolute obedience, taught deference and made the slaves accept their inferiority. This process was further strengthened by keeping them illiterate.

It was only as late as the 1960s when the civil rights movement was launched by Martin Luther King Jr. that some significant positive changes came for the blacks.

Even though America represented the "melting pot" concept proposed by Milton Gofdon, it was largely meant to be an extension of English institutions. So the blacks, Hispanics and Asian immigrants were largely confined to the fringes of American society. This led many to retain their distinct ethnic identities. Today, the blacks, chicanos and native Americans are the three most disadvantaged minorities in the USA.

Prejudice results in debasing stereotypes. Blacks are "lazy, unintelligent, hypersexed, and unmotivated." Such stereotypes have serious behavioural consequences in the form of discrimination. Some typical parameters of discrimination included income, unemployment, poverty, etc.

Let us examine some of the psycho-social causes of discrimination. Ethnic prejudice has been traced by psychologists to be an ego-defensive attitude. This implies that people are reluctant to acknowledge their own deep feelings of inferiority, impulses to violence and aggression and extreme sexual urges. So these unacceptable motives are unconsciously projected on to a suitably despised social group. Thus the white man who attributes hypersexuality and laziness to the blacks is able to believe that it is they who possess such abominable traits, not him or his kind.

Prejudice against minority groups can also originate from insecurity about one's own self-worth. By undermining and devaluing a vulnerable group that cannot retaliate, a sense of superiority over such a group can be established. The expression of attitudes of hostility and prejudice are also emotionally satisfying to the individuals.

All ethnic, religious, regional and other forms of prejudice result from an underlying process whereby the ego defends itself against accepting some harsh realities of life. Once developed, the prejudiced attitude is maintained by selectively perceiving those instances that support the attitude.

Another form of prejudice stems from the labels given to coloured people. The word 'nigger' is emotionally loaded and helps the user in blocking out realities. Stereotypes justify prejudice and discrimination. For example, the stereotype 'The blacks are lazy' is used for keeping them out of jobs that require skills, dedication, etc. Seeing them idling in street corners would lead to further strengthening the belief that blacks, as a group, are unmotivated.

There are functional reasons for stratifying any society. To begin with, every society has to ensure that the 'dirty job' gets done. People from the disadvantaged groups are recruited to do the same jobs at low wages. At the same time, people from these groups are prevented from taking better positions. They are thus forced to perform menial tasks for poor pay.

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